

A Romanian dictator Antonescu had syphilis

BUCHAREST (AFP) — Romanian war-time dictator Ion Antonescu, who declared that only a "Romanian solution" could save the country from the clutches of the Axis powers, was suffering from syphilis, a doctor has said.

Rare unicorn rhinoceros born in Rotterdam zoo

ROTTERDAM (AP) — A rare unicorn rhinoceros was born in a Rotterdam zoo on Wednesday, a zoo official said.

Opera singer fear getting lost backstage

TEL AVIV (AP) — The wife of Israel's top army commander in Lebanon signed a petition calling for a speedy withdrawal of troops from Lebanon, a newspaper said Wednesday.

Turkish offers sound-proof building for musicians

ANKARA (AFP) — Turkish authorities have detained 166 refugees trying to sneak across Turkey's border with Greece and Bulgaria in a bid to reach western Europe, the Anatolian news agency reported Wednesday.

Peres proposes forming national unity government

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres suggested on Wednesday the formation of a national unity government for six months "to save the peace process," Israeli public radio reported. Mr. Peres also said new elections should follow the six-month government, which would be formed by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud Party and the opposition Labour Party. Following the election, the two parties should commit to forming a national unity cabinet, the radio quoted him as saying. Mr. Peres' suggestions, made during a meeting with Labour Party head Ehud Barak, met with criticism from several Labour leaders. "It is not our role to maintain the current government, which has lost all credibility, using artificial respiration," said Labour MP Uzi Baran.

Iraq's Ibrahim undergoes heart surgery

BAGHDAD (AFP) — The number two in Iraq's leadership, Izzat Ibrahim, has undergone heart surgery in a Baghdad hospital, President Saddam Hussein announced Wednesday. President Hussein, quoted in official newspapers, said the bypass operation on Mr. Ibrahim was successful and that he was "now in good health." Mr. Ibrahim, 68, is vice chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council, Iraq's top decision-making body, and deputy commander in chief of the armed forces. He was hospitalised on Dec. 20 and had the operation at the end of the month.

Syrian group says it attacked Israeli position

BEIRUT (AFP) — A Syrian group on Wednesday said it carried out an overnight attack on an Israeli position in southern Lebanon, but made no mention of casualties in the operation. The organisation, calling itself "Hurricane," said in a statement here that it launched an attack with automatic weapons and anti-tank rockets against Israel's Hula position in the western sector of the Israeli-occupied "security" zone. Security officials in southern Lebanon gave no confirmation of the incident, which allegedly took place several kilometres from the Lebanese-Israeli border.

Israeli army takes down Palestinian telephone poles

BETHLEHEM (AFP) — The Israeli army uprooted more than 50 telephone poles erected by a Palestinian communications company in a West Bank village which remains under Israeli control on Wednesday, villagers said. A large force of Israeli soldiers closed off the village of Walaja outside Bethlehem as bulldozers and trucks took down the telephone poles. Mustapha Abu Tin, a member of the local council, told AFP. The Palestinian Communication Company, which is installing telephone infrastructure for the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), had erected the poles several weeks before to provide phone lines for the first time to the village of 2,000 people, Mr. Abu Tin said. But the army said the company was not permitted to put up the poles since Walaja, located on the edge of Jerusalem, lies in so-called Area C, a zone of the West Bank where the army has both civilian and security control.

Israeli general's wife signs petition for Lebanon withdrawal

TEL AVIV (AP) — The wife of Israel's top army commander in Lebanon signed a petition calling for a speedy withdrawal of troops from Lebanon, a newspaper said Wednesday. Rachel Levine signed the petition circulated by a grassroots movement several weeks ago, giving her identity card number and private address, the daily Yediot Ahronot said. Mrs. Levine's husband is Major General Amiram Levine, head of Israel's northern command that includes a swathe of south Lebanon occupied by Israel in 1985 to prevent cross border attacks by guerrillas.

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Ross mission hits trouble as Netanyahu scales back size of troop withdrawal to 8%

TEL AVIV (AFP) — U.S. envoy Dennis Ross ran into trouble Wednesday on his first peace mission of the new year as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reportedly scaled back plans for a new troop pull-back from the West Bank.

Mr. Ross was to meet for a second time in two days with Mr. Netanyahu, whose government has become more dependent than ever on hardline nationalists opposed to any new concessions to the Palestinians, particularly a large army withdrawal. Mr. Netanyahu has scaled back plans for a troop withdrawal and intends to hand over only six to eight per cent of the West Bank, an amount which Washington has already said is too small, the Israeli press said.

The prime minister told Mr. Ross in talks Tuesday that he was prepared for a confrontation with the United States, Israel's chief ally, if it continued to press for a larger redeployment, the daily Haaretz reported. Mr. Ross is in the region to push forward a package deal under which Israel would conduct a "credible" West Bank withdrawal in return for Palestinian agreement in writing to conduct a crackdown on anti-Israeli activists.

In talks on Tuesday, Mr. Ross assured Palestinian President Yasser Arafat that Washington would continue to insist Mr. Netanyahu conduct a withdrawal from at least 10 per cent of the West Bank, top Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erakat said.

Mr. Ross said Washington "holds the position that the redeployment must be credible and its scope must be in the double digits," Mr. Erakat told AFP.

Mr. Ross said "internal Israeli crises do not affect the position" of U.S. President Bill Clinton and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright "that the peace process must be put back on track," Mr. Erakat said.

Mr. Ross, who is to hold a second round of talks with Mr. Arafat after his meeting with Mr. Netanyahu, aims to salvage the package deal before Mr. Netanyahu and President Clinton separately in Washington on Jan. 20 and 22.

Before Wednesday's meeting with the U.S. envoy, Mr. Netanyahu met with his cabinet in a bid to close growing divisions which arose after the resignation of Foreign Minister David Levy, which came into effect on Tuesday.

Hardline nationalists, encouraged by the departure of Mr. Levy, who was seen as the top moderate in the coalition, have threatened to topple Mr. Netanyahu if he goes through with a withdrawal on the scale the Americans

Ross postpones meeting with Arafat until Thursday

BETHLEHEM (AFP) — A meeting between U.S. Middle East peace envoy Dennis Ross and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat scheduled for Wednesday evening has been postponed until Thursday, Palestinian officials said.

The American delegation asked for the delay because Mr. Ross' meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu which began earlier Wednesday was dragging on longer than expected, said the sources.

Mr. Ross said Washington "holds the position that the redeployment must be credible and its scope must be in the double digits," Mr. Erakat told AFP.

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seek. The moderate wing, which fears a confrontation with the U.S., fired back Wednesday with its own threats to pull out of the government if Mr. Netanyahu fails to go through with a pullback.

Israel Radio reported that 23 out of the 61 deputies in Mr. Netanyahu's parliamentary coalition had signed a letter warning that they would vote against the government if it did not carry out the troop withdrawals required under peace accords with the Palestinians.

"If there won't be a withdrawal... we won't be able to continue with the government and we will leave it," Internal Security Minister Avigdor Kahalani of the centrist Third Way Party told Israel Radio.

The departure of Mr. Levy's Geshet Party left Mr. Netanyahu with only a majority of one in the 120-member parliament, or Knesset.

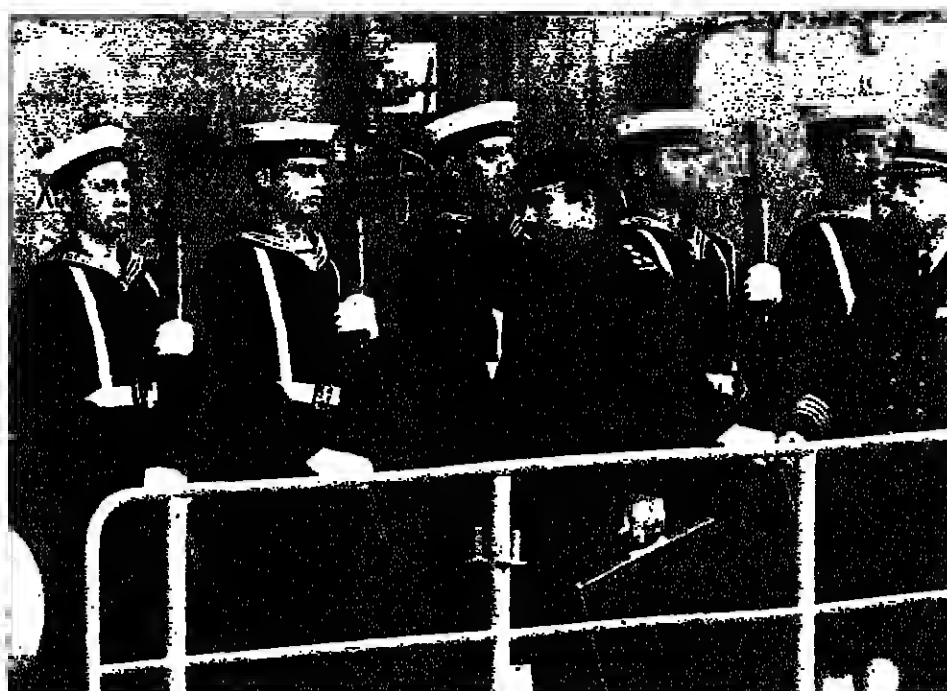
Mr. Ross was also to meet Wednesday with Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai, considered the top remaining moderate in the government.

Mr. Netanyahu has sought to elude pressure by both sides by refusing to announce the scope of a pullback and, at the same time, imposing conditions on the withdrawal which the Palestinians have rejected.

He insists the withdrawal can only occur after a five-month test period, during which the Palestinians implement a crackdown on anti-Israeli activists.

Mr. Netanyahu has demanded changes in a security cooperation accord reached by Israeli and Palestinian negotiators in November, which detailed such a crackdown and which President Arafat accepted.

Mr. Ross assured President Arafat that the U.S. backed the security accord, which is the other main plank in its package deal, "as it stands and does not accept any amendments," said a senior Palestinian official, who asked not to be named.



Brigadier General Hussein Khasawneh salutes a Turkish honourguard as he boards a Turkish ship in the Haifa harbour Wednesday. The general is participating as an observer in the naval rescue exercise, named 'Reliant Mermaid' involving Israeli, Turkish and U.S. navy ships in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea (AFP photo)

Deputies criticise government for attending Reliant Mermaid

By Fairouz Abu-Ghazaleh
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — A majority of deputies who had the chance Wednesday to address the Kingdom's decision to attend the joint U.S., Israeli, Turkish military exercises whipped the government for its decision during a heated session.

"We condemn this participation and warn against it," Deputy Mohammad Oran said. "Most of our citizens are against this and we fear that this maybe the stepping stone for more involvement or alliances," he added.

Deputy Nasha'at Hamameh asked the Lower House to issue a statement to condemn Jordan's participation in the five-day exercises.

"There is no justification for Jordan's participation in an Israeli-Turkish alliance that has America's blessings. Jordan should focus on its Arab ties and not its Turkish and Zionist ones," he said.

Deputy Mohammad Baidineh asked the government to withdraw from the exercises immediately.

"Our participation is an unjustified submission to American and Israeli pressures that target our national Arab security; therefore, we ask the government to terminate its participation and to withdraw from the manoeuvres immediately because our involvement serves as free backing of Israeli policies," he said.

Jordan is the only Arab country taking part in these military exercises mainly focusing on search and rescue operations in the sea. Egypt, Iraq, Syria and Iran

criticised Jordan for attending the manoeuvres held in Israeli territorial waters in the eastern Mediterranean and in international airspace.

The Arab League on Sunday denounced the exercises, part of an Israeli-Turkish military cooperation agreement signed in 1996, as harmful to the Middle East peace process. Other critics see the manoeuvres as a step designed to help the Jewish state increase its influence in the region.

Jordan, on the other hand, stressed that it was not participating but only sending one senior navy officer to "observe" the wargames. The government emphasised that its decision to attend the exercises, code-named "Reliant Mermaid," was a "sovereign" one.

"There is nothing for us to gain from this involvement which contradicts our overall national interests and our Arab and Muslim roots," Islamist Deputy Abdullah Akaleh said.

Deputy Mohammad Bani Hani also wondered about the benefits the country will gain by taking part in these manoeuvres.

"I don't see any benefits in our participation which accelerates normalisation with an enemy that's been known not to keep or respect a pledge. Besides, one person's training is not enough to benefit his country in military aspects," he said.

Deputy Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour defended the Kingdom's participation and its commitment to pan-Arab solidarity.

"On behalf of the government, I stress that there are no political goals or alliances behind these manoeuvres," Dr. Ensour said.

Dr. Ensour added that Jordan respected the decision of many Arab countries that have been taking part in joint military manoeuvres with non-Arab countries for the past 20 years, but now these countries are pointing their fingers at Jordan and criticising its involvement as an "observer."

Foreign Minister Faysal Tarawneh, who also defended the country's position, stressed the importance of respecting the country's sovereignty.

"Jordan has always announced its adherence to Arab decisions and stands, but we will never be subservient to other countries' policies presented in a pan-Arab formula. Jordan has its own sovereignty which we are proud of and which we respect," he said.

Some deputies supported Jordan's participation and described it as a positive step.

"These manoeuvres do not pose any grave consequences to Jordan, and Jordan's participation is a gesture of appreciation of our country," Deputy Fawaz Zoubi said.

Raji Hadad asked the deputies to look at the participation through its military rather than political dimensions. He said that Jordan's participation contributes to military intelligence gathering.

"We should encourage such an effort, which is a legitimate matter that is being practised all over the world."

Iraq allocates \$804m for food imports

BAGHDAD (AFP) — Sanctions-hit Iraq has allocated \$804 million for food imports under the next phase of the U.N. oil-for-food accord, a U.N. source said here Wednesday.

U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan approved Iraq's plan for the purchase and distribution of humanitarian imports on Monday, clearing the way for Baghdad to resume limited oil exports.

The oil-for-food accord allows Baghdad, which has been under embargo since its 1990 invasion of Kuwait, to export \$2 billion worth of crude every six months.

Two-thirds of the revenue goes to Iraq to buy humanitarian supplies, 30 per cent toward a compensation fund for the occupation of Kuwait, and four per cent to

finance the work of U.N. arms inspectors.

Out of its \$1.32 billion, Iraq plans to spend \$804.63 million on food and \$200 million on medicine, the U.N. source said. Around \$260 million of the total is for Kurdish-held northern Iraq.

Another \$65.38 million is to be spent on soap and other cleaning agents, and \$61.5 million for agricultural products.

Under the second six-month phase of the oil-for-food accord that expired on Dec. 5, Iraq allocated \$906 million for food imports and \$210 million for medicine.

Fifty-five million dollars was for repairs to Iraq's electricity network, \$50 million for agriculture, and \$44 million for the water and sewage systems.

Green light for 300 new units in W. Bank settlement — report

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Israelis living in the West Bank settlement of Efrat were granted permission on Wednesday to build an extra 300 units, state television reported.

The Israeli committee charged with planning matters for the West Bank, comprising army officers and interior ministry officials, gave permission for the new buildings at the settlement near Bethlehem, said the report.

A Jewish settler from Efrat told the television that the plan was to build as many new units as possible in the settlement so that one day it could be joined up to Jerusalem.

The announcement of new building work at Efrat comes as U.S. Middle East peace envoy Dennis Ross is visiting Israel in a bid to breathe new life into the moribund peace process.

Washington has repeatedly called for a "time-out" on all new settlement building as a measure to bring confidence to the process, but the call has been snubbed by right-wing Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Israeli Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai last week laid the first stone on building work to expand the West Bank settlement of Beit El by 100 units.

There are no taboo subjects" within the country, he said. An earlier decision by the government to impose advance censorship on programmes judged to be political was challenged by LBCI and struck down by the State Council, which judged it contrary to freedom of information.

Following the council's action, LBCI broadcast by satellite lively parliamentary debates which included opposition members accusing the government of corruption.

LBCI and Future Television principally broadcast by satellite to the Arab countries, LBCI has the

highest viewership in Lebanon and the Arab Gulf states among private Arab television channels.

Turkish authorities detain 166 West-bound refugees

ANKARA (AFP) — Turkish authorities have detained 166 refugees trying to sneak across Turkey's border with Greece and Bulgaria in a bid to reach western Europe, the Anatolian news agency reported Wednesday.

It said the refugees — 140 Iraqis, 10 Moroccans, six Egyptians, six Iranians, two Indians and two Pakistanis — were arrested by border guards.

More than 12,000 asylum-seekers, most of

them Iraqi Kurds, have been arrested by Turkish border guards in last year.

Overnight Tuesday, police raided an area on the European side of Istanbul and arrested 41 Iraqi nationals working illegally in local factories.

Similar raids on Sunday and Monday led to the arrest of 310 additional illegal immigrants.

In recent days, Turkey has launched a vast operation aimed at halting an

exodus of Kurds trying to reach the West, mainly via Italy which has a relatively liberal immigration policy toward asylum-seekers.

In Turkey's view, countries like Italy are encouraging illegal emigration by Kurds.

The Ankara government has been widely criticised for its treatment of the country's Kurds. But it insists the Kurds would be emigrants are seeking a richer life in the West rather than fleeing persecution.



Bassem Al Sahah highest viewership in Lebanon and the Arab Gulf states among private Arab television channels.

Israel, Turkey, U.S. forge ahead with drills amid diplomatic storm

ABOARD THE USS JOHN RODGERS (AFP) — The Israeli, Turkish and U.S. navies held their first joint manoeuvres Wednesday, rescuing vessels in mock distress as a diplomatic storm swirled around the huddling alliance between the Mideast's biggest military powers.

Backed up by helicopter search planes, warships from the three nations tracked down a disabled sailboat, motor yacht and patrol boat and rescued their stranded crews in an exercise officials said was aimed at improving humanitarian cooperation on the high seas.

The manoeuvres involved two Turkish frigates, this U.S. destroyer and two Israeli missile corvettes, each hunting for a different vessel in international waters 80-100 kilometres off the northern Israeli coast.

The three nations' warships were never in visual contact during the exercise, but each had liaison officers from the others' forces.

One of two U.S. helicopters dispatched to find the John Rodgers' target quickly located a troubled sailboat with a "man overboard".

Once the destroyer pulled alongside, two navy frogmen

jumped in the sea to rescue the drowning dummy, hauling it aboard the U.S. warship.

"I think everything went very, very well," said Lieutenant Paul Ray, a press liaison officer on the John Rodgers.

Lt. Ray said all three nations' ships quickly located and "rescued" their boats.

"The use of helicopters let us find the vessels very quickly, and it helped that we had excellent weather, much better than forecast," Lt. Ray told AFP.

After a night of high winds and choppy seas, the naval exercise took place under sunny skies and on calm waters.

But the manoeuvres ran into rough diplomatic weather as Arab states plus Iran, Greece and Russia expressed alarm at the emerging alliance between Israel and Turkey — both relative outsiders in a tough neighbourhood.

Only Jordan refrained from attacking the exercise and even sent its navy chief to observe the operation.

Russia, an historic rival of the Ottoman empire in the Middle East, said the manoeuvres could "aggravate mistrust and handicap efforts to bring stability to this

region."

Egypt, which turned down an invitation to observe the manoeuvres, warned that any Turkish alliance with Israel "will trigger the establishment of a counter-alliance" in the region.

Syria, sandwiched between Israel and Turkey and embroiled in disputes with both, said the manoeuvres "reflect the aggressive intentions of those two countries against Arabs."

Lithuania accused Turkey of "betraying its identity and historic ties to Muslims and Arabs, defying the beliefs of its people and licking the boots of the Americans and Israelis."

Such concerns led to the postponement of Reliant Mermaid twice, once last summer and again in November. But with strong U.S. backing, Israel and Turkey forged ahead with the exercise, which all three countries insisted was purely civilian in purpose.

"Reliant Mermaid is strictly humanitarian in nature... it is not related to any real-world events nor is it directed against any party," U.S. State Department spokesman James Rubin said.

But Israeli analysts viewed

the manoeuvres as a strategic leap forward for military cooperation between the Jewish state and predominantly Muslim Turkey which began with a 1996 cooperation pact.

That agreement has involved joint air force training, including Israeli flights over Turkey, and a series of multi-million dollar deals under which Israel is upgrading Turkey's air and tank forces.

"The armies are progressing from the stage of talk and paperwork to real cooperation in the field of action," said Ron Ben Yishai, military analyst for the Yediot Ahronot newspaper.

"When the two strongest armies in the Middle East, who have the most developed military industries in the region, are focused on achieving an unwritten military alliance and when the world superpower grants this process its support, other countries in the region have cause for concern," he said.

Turkish-Israeli ties are expected to deepen further due to the European Union's decision last month not to consider Turkey's candidacy to join the 15-nation body and the stalemate in the Israeli-Arab peace process.



COPTIC CHRISTMAS: Pope Shenouda III of the Coptic Orthodox Church waves incense at the congregation in the Cathedral of St. Mark in Cairo during the night-time celebration of Coptic Christmas, which falls on Wednesday, January 7, 1998. The 74-year-old Pope later gave a sermon to the several thousand congregants, segregated according to sex on either side of the church (AP photo)

AI urges Israel's High Court to respect international law by rejecting torture

AMMAN (J.T.) — As Israel's High Court of Justice embarks on a review of the use of certain interrogation methods by the General Security Service (GSS), Amnesty International (AI) called on the court to reject continued use of these techniques, as they constitute torture and are in flagrant breach of Israel's commitments under international law.

A statement by AI said yesterday: "Israel is the only country in the world known to have effectively legalised torture by officially allowing such methods. We are hoping for a clear ruling by the High Court that the use of such interrogation techniques is unacceptable."

Earlier this week, Aaron Barak, the president of the Israeli High Court, scheduled an unprecedented hearing by nine High Court judges to review the following interrogation methods: use of sleep deprivation for prolonged periods; forcing of detainees to remain in painful positions; hooding; and being forced to listen to loud noise for extended periods of time.

Aaron Barak ordered the session after the court heard an application by counsel for Fu'ad 'Abd Qur'an, a student at Bir Zeit University in the West Bank. The GSS is suspected of using the techniques being reviewed by the court to interrogate him since his arrest on Dec. 10, 1997.

The methods under discussion today have been effectively legalised since the publication in 1987 of a report by an official commission of inquiry on interrogation, chaired by Justice Moshe Landau, at that time himself a High Court judge. The Landau Commission sanctioned the use of what it called "moderate physical pressure," defined in detail in secret guidelines, during interrogation. Ten years later these guidelines remain secret.

"A decision by the High Court condemning the use of these interrogation methods could be a key step towards ending the systematic use of torture and ill-treatment by the Israeli GSS, officially

sanctioned since the publication of the Landau Commission report," AI observed.

Israel — which ratified the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment in 1991 — has since attracted strong criticism from the United Nations Committee against Torture (CAT) for its continued use of torture and ill-treatment.

During its 18th session in May 1997, the CAT declared that a number of interrogation techniques employed by Israel — including the ones being reviewed by the High Court today — constituted torture and contravened international law.

Norwegian FM in Israel to save Oslo peace process

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Norwegian Foreign Minister Kari Vollebaek arrived in Israel Wednesday as part of renewed efforts by his government to bolster the teetering peace process born in secret talks in Oslo in 1993.

Mr. Vollebaek, who arrived from Jordan, was scheduled to meet with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Infrastructure Minister Ariel Sharon — the cabinet's leading hardliner — and senior officials in the foreign ministry.

Norwegian officials said last week that Mr. Vollebaek would also be meeting with Palestinian leaders during his stay in the Middle East.

Mr. Vollebaek said before leaving Norway that he hoped to stimulate the revival of direct Israeli-Palestinian negotiations frozen since Israel began building a new Jewish settlement in Arab east Jerusalem 10 months ago.

Saudi newspaper calls for Arab probe into Algerian massacres

RIYADH (AFP) — A Saudi newspaper on Wednesday urged the Algerian government to agree to an Arab investigation into the increasingly bloody massacres which have hit the country.

An inquiry by Arab countries would not be a violation of Algerian sovereignty, said Al Jazeera, which like the rest of the Saudi press generally reflects the views of the government.

The Algerian government should "accept the offers of Arab countries and cooperate with them to study ways of pursuing the perpetrators of these terrorist crimes and unmasking their identity," the paper said. "The string of terrorist crimes which have hit Algeria are unacceptable and joint efforts must be made to stop them by all means, political as well as military."

An inquiry by Arab countries

would not be a violation of Algeria's national sovereignty and would not constitute any interference in its internal affairs," Al Jazeera said. Al Jazeera has rejected a chorus of calls for an international inquiry into the massacres, in which hundreds of civilians are reported to have been killed in the last few days alone, saying it would be a violation of its sovereignty.

Syria brands Israeli comments on south Lebanon a misleading ploy

DAMASCUS (AFP) — Syria on Wednesday branded comments by Israeli officials about its conditional acceptance of a U.N. resolution calling for its unilateral withdrawal from south Lebanon a misleading ploy.

"There is no new element in the Israeli statements, which still speak of security conditions," said the government newspaper Tishrin.

"The Israeli comments about their disposition towards recognition of U.N.

Resolution 425 are misleading ploys and lies aimed at saving Israel from its snare in south Lebanon and disavowing the Syrian and Lebanese tracks" of the peace process with Israel, it added.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Sunday that Israel was ready to accept the 20-year-old resolution calling for its withdrawal, "provided it is possible to reach an agreement with Lebanon which

will ensure the security procedures required by Israel."

The resolution, adopted in 1978, calls for an immediate and unconditional Israeli withdrawal from south Lebanon. Israel has occupied part of southern Lebanon since 1978. In 1985, three years after a full-scale invasion, it withdrew to the buffer zone, which it describes as a "security zone" to protect its northern territory from attack.

Explosives expert testifies in trial of three charged with smuggling weapons to W. Bank

By Rana Hussein
Jordan Times Staff Reporter

AMMAN — An explosives expert testifying in the trial of three men accused of sabotage and smuggling weapons to the West Bank Wednesday said he was unable to detonate a hand grenade found in the possession of one of the defendants.

Hashem Kasab, from the Criminal Lab, was testifying in the case of Ismat Shukri, who is charged with manufacturing explosives in 1995 with the intent of using them against tourists, a charge that could carry the death penalty, and smuggling weapons to

the West Bank from 1995 to 1997 via the Dead Sea.

Last week, Mr. Shukri testified in court that he owned machine guns because he was a member of a radical Palestinian group until 1992, and that the hand grenade the authorities seized from his house was "in fact a piece of a small metal box shaped like a grenade. I found it in the street and gave it to my children to play with as a toy."

The explosives expert told the court: "I also tried to detonate a substance [in the object] but it would not explode."

The prosecution is charging that the arms and the hand

grenade, which was filled with a substance identified as potassium nitrate, found with the possession of Mr. Shukri were intended for terrorist attacks.

The defendant's wife, Thawrah Mahmoud, 28, confirmed her husband's story concerning the hand grenade, stating that when the authorities searched the house, "they found the small metal box in the hands of my children."

"My husband and I found this small metal box while returning home one night, and we decided to give it to our children to play with," the woman stated.

Two other defendants, Ali

Abdul Karim, and Mohamad Mubarak, are being tried in absentia for the same charges.

Last month, several prosecution witnesses testified under oath that they found automatic weapons and explosives in the defendant's house, as well as in a suitcase, which the prosecution is charging belonged to Mr. Shukri, hidden in the Zana area near the Dead Sea.

The military court, headed by Judge Yousef Fauri, and including Judges Ahmad Ayash and Fawaz Bopqat, adjourned the session until Jan. 10.

JORDAN TELEVISION Tel. 773111-19	
PROGRAMME TWO	
Thursday Programmes	
14:10	My Little Fairy Tale
14:30	French Programmes
16:15	Prayers
16:30	Believe and Behave
17:00	NBA
18:00	The Prince & The Pauper
18:30	News Headlines
18:35	Big Brother Jake
19:00	Le Journal
19:05	Ramadan Talks
19:35	Black Hat Chef
20:00	Over a Cup of Tea
20:30	Lois & Clark
21:10	The Oprah Winfrey Show
22:00	News in English
22:30	Feature Film: "Miracle Landing"
23:59	Music Show
Friday Programmes	
14:10	Ruxpin
14:30	French Programmes
16:15	Prayers
16:30	Believe and Behave
17:00	Wishbone
17:30	Metro Cafe
18:30	News Headlines
18:35	Small Talk
19:00	Le Journal
19:15	Ramadan Talk
19:35	Life on the Internet
20:00	Friends
20:30	Adventures of Brisco County
21:10	Knife to the Heart
22:00	News in English
22:30	Mini-series — Streets of Laredo
23:15	Feature Film

PRAYER TIMES

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

05:10	Fajr
06:32	(Sunrise) Doha
11:42	Dhuhr
14:29	Asr
16:52	Maghreb
18:14	Isha

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology
Cool weather conditions will prevail during the weekend with skies cloudy to partly cloudy. Scattered showers are expected and winds westerly to northwesterly moderate. In Aqaba, skies will be partly cloudy, winds northerly moderate and seas calm.

Amman	.....06/12
Aqaba	.....10/21
Deserts	.....05/15
Jordan Valley	.....11/22

Yesterday's high temperatures: Amman 13, Aqaba 22. Humidity readings: Amman 81 per cent. Aqaba 34 per cent.

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS

NIGHT DUTY	
AMMAN:	
Dr. Hama Mansour	.....758863
Dr. Afif Shukri	.....898863
Dr. Nidal Al Dahleh	.....827195
Dr. Sa'ad Tawfiq	.....788285
Firas pharmacy	.....661912
Ferdows pharmacy	.....778336
Al Asema pharmacy	.....637055
Nairouh pharmacy	.....623672
Al Salam pharmacy	.....636730
Yacoub pharmacy	.....644945

Shmeisani pharmacy	.....637660
Najib pharmacy	.....847632
IRBID:	
Dr. Ahmad Qanu	.....281484
Al Quds pharmacy(---)
ZARQA:	
Dr. Rathi Atallah	.....994424
Khalifeh pharmacy	.....985417

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre	.....637111
Civil Defence Department	.....661111
Civil Defence Immediate Rescue	.....630341
Civil Defence Emergency	.....199
Rescue Police 192	.....621111
637777	
Fire Brigade	.....617101
Blood Bank	.....775121
Highway Police	.....843402
Traffic Police	.....896390
Public Security Department	.....630321
Hotel Complaints	.....605800
Price Complaints	.....661176
Water and Sewerage Complaints	.....897467
Amman Municipality Complaints	.....787111
Telephone Information (directory assistance)	.....121
Overseas Calls	.....010230
Central Amman Telephone Repairs	.....623101
Abdali Telephone Repairs	.....661101
Jordan Television	.....773111
Radio Jordan	.....774111
Water Authority	.....680100

Jordan Electricity Authority	.....815615
Electric Power Company	.....636381
RJ Flight Information	08-53200
Queen Alia Intl. Airport	08-53200

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:	
Hussein Medical Centre	.....813813/52
Khalidi Maternity	.....644281/6
Akileh Maternity	.....642411/2
Jabal Amman Maternity	642362
Malhas, J. Amman	.....636140
Palestine, Shmeisani	607071
Shmeisani Hospital	.....669131
University Hospital	.....845845
Al-Muasher Hospital	.....66727/9
The Islamic, Abdali	666126/37
Al-Ahli, Abdali	664164/6
Italian, Al-Muhajreen	777101/3
Al-Bashir	.....775111/26
Army, Marka	.....891611/15
Queen Alia Hospital	.....602340/50
Amal Hospital	.....674155
The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery	.....865199
ZARQA:	
Zarqa Govt. Hospital	.....09/983323
Zarqa National Hospital	.....09/900560
Ibn Sina Hospital	09/986732
Al Hikma Modern Hospital	.....

IRBID:	.....09/90990
Princess Basma Hospital	.....02/275555
Greek Catholic Hospital	.....02/272275
Ibn Al Nafess Hospital	.....02/247100
AQABA:	
Princess Haya Hospital	.....03/314111

FOR THE TRAVELLER

QUEEN ALIA INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT
This information is supplied by Royal Jordanian (RJ) information department at the Queen Alia International Airport Tel. 14453200 where it should always be verified. Information on other flights are supplied on phone 44 (52700) or 44 (53250).

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights	
08:00	Sana'a (RJ)
08:25	Bombay (RJ)
09:15	Dhahran, Riyadh (RJ)
09:30	New Delhi (RJ)
10:05	Muscat, Dubai (RJ)
10:15	Doha, Bahrain (RJ)
10:30	Colombo (RJ)
10:35	Beirut (RJ)
15:00	New York, Amsterdam (RJ)
16:25	London (RJ)

18:05	Athens (RJ)



KING HOSTS IFTAR: His Majesty King Hussein, HRH Crown Prince Hassan, and Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali Wednesday perform Al Maghreb prayer at an iftar held in honour of dignitaries from the Ma'an, Tafleh, Aqaba, and Madaba governorates. Also attending the iftar were Royal Court Chief Awn Khawneh, Chief Chamberlain Prince Ra'd Ben Zeid, Private Chamberlain Prince Ali Ben Nayef, the King's advisors, and the governors of the four governorates. The Crown Prince Tuesday hosted an iftar for Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Field Marshal Abdul Hafez Kaabneh and retired military officials.

Queen opens rehabilitation centre in Baqa'a

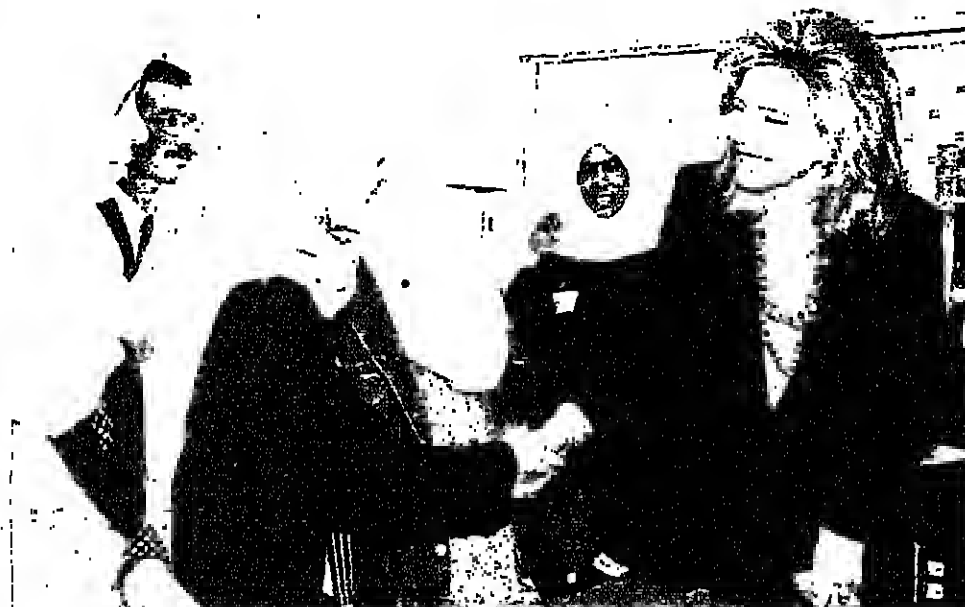
AMMAN (J.T.) — Her Majesty Queen Noor Wednesday inaugurated the Community Rehabilitation Centre for the Disabled in Baqa'a, according to a press release Wednesday.

Queen Noor noted that while the number of institutions serving the disabled has increased from one in 1964 to 112, it is estimated that only 12 per cent of the disabled benefit from these services, which are mostly located in major cities.

The Queen praised the dedication of the centre's staff, who started working in Baqa'a in 1988 from two small wooden barracks. With the help of the Swedish organisation Daikonia, UNRWA, the Ministry of Social Development, the embassies of the United States and Germany, and donations from Jordanians, they were able to raise funds to build this new comprehensive regional centre. The Queen, who donated equipment to the centre, presented its sponsors with plaques in honour of their contributions and support, the statement read.

The Community Rehabilitation Centre is a two-story building with 30 classrooms, a cafeteria, departments for physiotherapy, occupational therapy, and sections for patients with mental, physical, and multiple disabilities.

The staff, comprising specialists from international organisations and 33 local volunteers,



Queen Noor shakes hands with several women while touring the Palestinian refugee camp of Baqa'a Wednesday. The Queen inaugurated a modern Rehabilitation Center for the Disabled in the crowded Baqa'a camp, whose inhabitants fled the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, as part of the Kingdom's charitable activities during Ramadan (Reuters photo).

cares for 80 children between the ages of 4-14 daily, while an additional 80 children take advantage of the centre's services on a weekly basis. According to the centre's estimates, four to five per cent of the inhabitants of Baqa'a and Al Hawd are disabled, the announcement continued.

Last July, the Minister of Social Development Mohammed Khair Mamsar declared that 1998 would be dedicated to caring for the disabled. According to the minister, at least 80,000 disabled people in Jordan are not receiving medical care. The World Health Organisation

(WHO) estimates that the number of those suffering from disabilities ranges from seven to ten per cent of the population, or 370,000 - 400,000 Jordanians.

The Baqa'a camp was set up in 1968 to accommodate Palestinian refugees and displaced persons who left the West Bank and Gaza Strip as a result of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. UNRWA provides education, health and social services to the camp residents. Jordan has been providing assistance to refugees who now reside in ten camps in the Kingdom and has recently allocated JD173

million as part of a social security package programme to improve services for these camps, the statement read.

Jordan, which hosts 41 per cent of the total Palestinian refugees in the diaspora, is spending approximately \$350 million annually on refugees living in Jordan — a sum which is almost equivalent to UNRWA's annual budget. Queen Noor was received by Mr. Mamsar, the governor of Baqa'a, the president of the centre's local committee, Ibrahim Badwan, the UNRWA director, and the director of the centre, the statement concluded.

Lower House to begin discussion of 1998 draft state budget on Sunday

By Fairouz Abu-Ghazaleh
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — The Lower House of Parliament is scheduled to begin its discussion of the draft state budget for 1998 on Sunday. The House is expected to vote on it before the end of this month to enable the government to start disbursing this year's allocations.

The House, pressed for time, will interrupt its ongoing discussion of the draft customs law carried over from the 12th Parliament. A total of 200 articles out of the law's 256 articles have now been endorsed.

According to financial regulations, the Ministry of Finance cannot disburse any funds until the House clears the draft budget.

The 1998 fiscal budget amounts to JD1.95 billion, 5.7 per cent higher than last year's, with total expenditures estimated at JD1.87 billion and a deficit estimated at JD37 million.

Minister of Finance Suleiman Hafez said the deficit was within targets set by the International Monetary Fund, which is supervising the Kingdom's economic reform programme introduced in 1989.

During Wednesday's session, the House resumed its discussion of the technicalities of the newly reinstated item on the sessions' agendas that gives deputies the right to question the government on its policies regarding matters of immediate concern.

After a long discussion, which was interrupted by a clash and a harsh exchange of words between deputies Abdul Raouf Rawabdeh and Nazih Ammarin, the House voted to extend the total time allocated for discussion under this item to one hour at the beginning of each session.

instead of the proposed 30 minutes. They also voted to limit each deputy who wishes to speak, on urgent matters only, to 3 minutes.

For the first time since the beginning of the House's ordinary session on Nov. 29, deputies discussed several matters that fell under the item known as "current urgent matters worth discussing." Jordan's decision to "observe" the Jan. 5 military exercises by Turkish, Israeli, and American navies in the eastern Mediterranean was the issue that dominated yesterday's discussion (see Related story on page 1).

Prime minister inspects plans to enlarge Al Bashir Hospital, expand services

AMMAN (Petra) — Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali Wednesday inspected plans by the Ministry of Health and Medical Care to expand the services offered by Al Bashir Hospital.

Located in the Ashrafieh district, the hospital normally offers services to government employees, their dependants, and the poor.

According to Minister of

Health and Medical Care Ashraf Kurdi, the hospital will be expanded in three stages. The first two involve the construction of annex buildings, while the third entails modernising the existing premises, including connecting new and old buildings with overhead bridges and tunnels to facilitate movement, he said.

Addressing a meeting attended by senior Ministry

of Health officials and Royal Medical Services Director Major General Yousef Qousus, Dr. Majali underlined the need for Jordan to introduce a health insurance system covering all Jordanians. He stated that all citizens and companies will have to participate in this vital plan.

The prime minister said several comprehensive health centres should be

established in Amman to ease the pressure on Al Bashir Hospital, the only government-run hospital in the capital.

Health centres in Amman and other regions can, if needed, refer cases to Al Bashir Hospital, he added.

Dr. Majali also urged Al Bashir Hospital to maintain closer cooperation with the Royal Medical Services.

Jordan Valley Authority takes possession of new \$70 million dam

AMMAN (J.T.) — The Jordan Valley Authority (JVA) has just taken possession of the Karamah Dam, built in the Jordan Valley by two Italian firms at the cost of \$70 million, according to a Water Authority of Jordan (WAO) spokesperson.

According to the contract, the two firms will continue to supervise the dam's functions and carry out the necessary maintenance for another year, at which time the dam will be fully handed over to Jordan, he said.

According to the spokesperson, the Jordanian treasury covered 45 per cent of the dam's cost, while the rest was provided by the Kuwait-based Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development.

The dam, on which work began in 1994, is located at Wadi Mallaha and is

designed to store up to 55 million cubic metres of water for irrigating around 40,000 dunums of farmland. The dam, which is 45 metres high and two kilometres in length, has already collected 14 million cubic metres over the past two weeks.

When full, the reservoir behind the Karamah Dam, the second largest in the Kingdom after the 80-million cubic metre capacity King Talal Dam, will cover 4 square kilometres in surface area, the spokesperson noted.

The project also entailed laying a pipeline to draw water from the King Abdullah Canal to the reservoir, he added.

Including the Kafrein Dam, the country's six dams now hold nearly 84 million cubic metres, about 52.3 per cent of total capacity.

Majali meets with Christian delegation, expresses Kingdom's commitment to peace

AMMAN (Petra) — Jordan is committed to peace as a strategic option and will continue to follow a path leading to the establishment of a just and comprehensive peace for all people in the Middle East, Prime Minister Abdul Salam Majali said Wednesday.

At a meeting with a visiting delegation representing the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Pales-

tine and Jordan, the prime minister said Jordan's stands are rooted in the principles laid down by the founder of the Kingdom, the late King Abdullah, who had worked for and fell as a martyr of the cause of peace.

Reviewing the events and circumstances that the region has experienced over the past decades, the prime minister said the time has come for the

people in this region to enjoy a just and durable peace. He added that all obstacles in the path of peace and stability must be removed.

Dr. Majali stressed that both Christianity and Islam embody sublime values, which are being highlighted by Jordan through the interfaith dialogues spearheaded by HRH Crown Prince Hassan.

Bishop Munib Yunan, the head of the delegation, expressed his church's deep appreciation for the efforts of His Majesty King Hussein and Prince Hassan in seeking peace and for their continued support for the church and its activities in Jordan.

The ministers of public works and housing and tourism and antiquities were also present at the meeting.

WHAT'S GOING ON

CONCERT

* Musical performance by Linefield Wind Symphony and the band of the National Music Conservatory at Philadelphia Hotel on Saturday, Jan. 10, at 8:00 p.m.

EXHIBITIONS

* Exhibition of writing arabesque, miniature on silk by Hatouf Hijazi Tabba'a, at the Jordan Arts and Crafts Centre, Jabal Amman, 2nd Circle (Tel. 647858) until Jan. 15.

* Works by about a hundred artists from Iraq, Syria, Sudan, Lebanon and Jordan at Hamourabi Art Gallery, Gardens Street, until Feb. 20 (Tel. 5536098).

* Works by contemporary Arab artists at Darat Al Funun, Jabal Weibdeh.

Iraqi refugees in Jordan

Taking refuge in Kingdom from political, economic hardships

By Lola M. Keilani
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Aseel, a 43-year-old Iraqi university graduate, is working as a domestic helper for a Jordanian family to earn a living after fleeing Iraq following the 1990 Gulf crisis, sparked by Iraq's occupation of Kuwait.

Her plight is similar to that faced by many of the 100,000 Iraqis taking refuge in Jordan from economic hardship and political uncertainty back home. Others are seeking political asylum or are waiting for immigration formalities to start a new life in the West.

Many of them are highly-educated professionals who have accepted menial jobs and are languishing on the hopes of returning to Iraq one day.

Most have no residency permits and live in constant fear of being rounded up and deported, even though they believe the government has long turned a blind eye to their illegal stay.

"Living conditions back home became impossible," lamented Aseel, who holds a B.Sc. in chemistry. She said her monthly salary in Baghdad was hardly enough to buy a dozen eggs — inflation has skyrocketed since the U.N. imposed economic sanctions on Iraq eight years ago.

But over the years, her personal safety became a priority.

Mourning robberies and fears for her ailing husband, who was detained and "tortured" by the Iraqi authorities, "for expressing criticism of the regime," made her decide to come to Jordan — the main safe-haven for most Iraqis.

Many Iraqi refugees interviewed by the Jordan Times said faltering public security, prompted by soaring poverty, unemployment, and the involvement of the police in theft, were the main reasons for their departure.

"My house was robbed twice," said Aseel, covering her head in a traditional black scarf. "One day, as I was driving my car, a young man with a machine gun stopped us and stole our car," she said. "I found out later that the thief was a security officer."

Many Iraqis said it had become common for Iraqis to leave their houses carrying a gun to protect themselves.

"The law of the jungle rules... chaos is everywhere," said a 28-year-old Iraqi woman who requested anonymity.

According to official figures, only 30,000 of the Iraqis in Jordan have residency permits.

Thousands others are staying on a temporary basis. They stay for up to six months, leave, then re-enter for a similar period before they are forced to leave.

Many are counting on relatives in the U.S., Australia, New Zealand, and Europe to send them visas.

"We have been living in Jordan for three years and we are still waiting for an approval for our application to immigrate to Australia," said Jameelah, who earns JD60 a

month working as a secretary for 12 hours a day, six days a week.

"But the immigration does not seem to be working," added the 29-year-old woman, whose family — her mother and two brothers — have no official residency or work permits.

Employment opportunities are scarce for Jordanians, let alone Iraqis. Officials have put unemployment at 15 per cent, but independent economists say it could be as high as 27 per cent.

Many Iraqis also complain that Jordanian employers are abusing their situation by overworking them and underpaying them.

"In general, most Iraqi workers in Jordan are in demand because they accept cheap wages and long working hours, something a Jordanian would never take," said a company owner.

Jordanians say their generally pro-Iraqi sympathies, relying on historic and social links, are not as apprehensive towards Iraqi workers as they

were towards Egyptians seeking employment.

Iraq's Dec. 8 execution of four Jordanians for smuggling spare auto parts out of Baghdad angered many Jordanians, who said the treatment of their nationals in Baghdad did not merit the "kindness Jordanians have shown towards the Iraqis in Amman."

Many Iraqis residing here illegally now fear the government will not show the same tolerance as it did in the past.

"I was in a taxi when the radio announced the executions," said an elderly Iraqi man who requested anonymity. "I was terrified after the driver pulled over, parked, and asked me to leave," he said.

"The driver told me, 'We treat you nicely, but look what you do to our people.'"

To receive a working permit, an Iraqi should have a professional or academic specialisation that is rare in Jordan, such as a PhD university lecturer or a high medical qualification.

Otherwise, his or her resi-

dency will be limited to six months.

But many Iraqis believe that Jordan, on humanitarian grounds, will keep overlooking their illegal stay.

His Majesty King Hussein has always expressed his desire to help end the suffering of "our Iraqi brethren."

A large percentage of Iraqis who have taken refuge in Jordan are political refugees seeking asylum in Western states after Iraqi authorities prosecuted them for political activism. Many of them are waiting to receive refugee status in Western states with the help of the Amman office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees.

"Up to 20 per cent of those who apply manage to receive refugee status," said one UNHCR employee.

"Some of the cases we see are painful and unbelievable. They show us the scars of torture that has remained on their bodies," he said.

Because of long queues, an Iraqi has to wait for three to four months to get a UNHCR

interview. The process of finding the applicant a host country often takes a long time.

While most of the Iraqis in Jordan are impoverished workers, others are affluent businessmen, living in luxury villas with legal residencies. Running multi-million-dollar enterprises, they use Jordan as a hub to export and import items for Baghdad that are sanctioned by the U.N.

Others have formed joint ventures with Jordanians to build massive shopping malls and factories.

Now they feel that everything is back to normal since the exchange of top level visits and the renewal of the trade protocol, which allows Jordan to buy crude oil at prices lower than the international standard.

Though the U.N.-sponsored "oil-for-food" deal nourished hopes among those Iraqis that their miseries will become less, reports from Baghdad discouraged many of those Iraqis and killed their hope for return.

Bosnia has made 'dramatic progress' — U.S. envoy

WASHINGTON (AFP) — War-torn Bosnia-Herzegovina has made "dramatic progress" in implementing a two-year-old peace agreement "although we remain somewhat behind schedule," a U.S. official said here Tuesday.

Robert Gelbard, the U.S. special envoy for Bosnia, said that all sides had balked at implementing the 1995 peace agreement but the Bosnian Serbs remained the most recalcitrant.

Croatia and Serbia — which had each supported belligerents in the three-year-war — could do more, he added.

"We feel that those two countries have not done as much as they should," he said, calling particularly on Croatia to dismantle separatist organisations in Herzegovina and Serbia to pressure Bosnian Serbs to

turn in war criminals living freely in northern Bosnia.

Mr. Gelbard reiterated the U.S. determination to use diplomacy to convince war criminals to surrender. "It (diplomacy) is obviously our preference. (But) we will not discard any other method," he said.

Although the war ended two years ago, just 21 of 78 people known to have been indicted on war crimes are in custody, according to the U.S. State Department.

Mr. Gelbard said that he expected the details of the mandate of a NATO-led follow-on force to be worked out in coming weeks. The United States has announced that it will participate in the force after its current mandate expires in June 1998.

The U.S. official also warned about the possibility of violence in Montenegro, where an opponent of Serbian

President Slobodan Milosevic won last October's presidential vote.

Mr. Gelbard said that Washington was "tremendously concerned by threats of violence" that could impede a democratic transition in Montenegro.

The republic is the junior partner in the Yugoslav federation dominated by Serbia, in particular by Mr. Milosevic, whose state-controlled media and political allies have denounced reformist prime minister Milo Djukanovic.

Mr. Djukanovic defeated outgoing President Momir Bulatovic, a long-time ally of Mr. Milosevic. Mr. Bulatovic has contested the result.

Mr. Bulatovic has also said that he feared arrest since Mr. Djukanovic has accused him of going beyond his presidential powers by granting amnesty to 606 convicts,

many of them for "family and friendship reasons."

While Mr. Gelbard will be in the region on Jan. 15, he will not be attending Mr. Djukanovic's inauguration because of a scheduling conflict, the U.S. official told reporters here.

Another flashpoint, Serbia's ethnic Albanian enclave of Kosovo, "is of great concern to us," said Mr. Gelbard, who pointed to growing violence, a failure to hold talks and the failure to implement a 1996 agreement to reopen Albanian language schools as aggravations.

He warned that Belgrade's failure to hold talks with Kosovo activists could radicalise the situation, but also warned that the Kosovo Liberation Army is "running the risk of being a terrorist" organisation — something the United States would not countenance.

Sonia switch over election campaign launch at Rajiv Gandhi murder site

NEW DELHI (AFP) — Sonia Gandhi, widow of former Indian premier Rajiv Gandhi, has pushed forward the launch of her election campaign for the Congress party at the site of her husband's 1991 murder, an aide said Wednesday.

Italian-born Sonia Gandhi has changed her visit to the southern town of Sriperumbudur, where her husband was blown up by a suicide bomber, to Jan. 11, he said.

Earlier officials said she would visit the town on Jan. 14 before upcoming polls in February-March.

The aide told AFP that Sonia Gandhi, who, last month announced her decision to plunge into active politics, would pay homage at her husband's memorial site before addressing a rally "of several thousands of people."

"She will pick up the thread from where Rajiv Gandhi had left it."

Sriperumbudur, a sleepy small town popular for its Hindu temple, is located near Madras, capital of the state of Tamil Nadu.

Rajiv Gandhi was killed while electioneering on May 21, 1991.

The assassination was blamed on the Liberation

Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), which is campaigning for a Tamil homeland in neighbouring Sri Lanka. The LTTE has, however, denied involvement.

Rajiv Gandhi, who was India's prime minister in 1984-89, was president of the once-dominant Congress and had been widely expected to lead the party back to power in the 1991 polls when he was killed.

The earlier date of Jan. 14 for the launch of Sonia's Gandhi's campaign was chosen because it is the New Year day in Tamil Nadu.

Analysts expect the polls to end in a hung parliament. The Congress, steadily losing support in recent years, is hoping to capitalise on the aura surrounding the Gandhi name to revive its fortunes.

Sonia Gandhi's public address will be the first since the enigmatic mother-of-two spoke at a Congress convention in Calcutta last year, and the second since she addressed thousands of supporters at her husband's former constituency of Amethi, in the country's north, two years ago.

"Rajiv Gandhi left behind

a programme which has to be carried on," said the aide, requesting anonymity.

"Sonia Gandhi's decision is meant to do just that."

Sonia Gandhi's foray into active politics has electrified the political scenario, where the beleaguered Congress, which governed India for around 40 years after independence, faces a possible rout.

Her party is hoping to convince Sonia Gandhi to go one step further by becoming a candidate in the elections, despite her total lack of political experience.

India's national elections, staggered over four days of balloting, are due to begin on Feb. 22 and end on March 7.

India's Hindu nationalists are tipped to consolidate their position as the country's largest party in the elections ahead of the Congress, which was voted out of power in 1996 in its worst electoral result.

Sonia Gandhi had earlier been expected to travel from Sriperumbudur to the neighbouring southern states of Karnataka, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh, but it was not clear Wednesday if she would stick to that schedule.

S. Korea likely to respond positively to food appeal despite crisis

SEOUL (AFP) — South Korea indicated Wednesday it would positively respond to the latest international appeal for food aid for North Korea even though it desperately needs foreign exchange.

"We need U.S. dollars desperately, and North Korea knows that. But we are hoping to respond positively to this call for aid on humanitarian grounds," a government source told AFP.

"The appeal will be carefully examined. Just because we are in difficulty, we can't ignore our obligations to the international community," he said.

South Korea's contribution to the appeal by the World Food Programme (WFP) last year totalled about \$27.4 million. But this year, government officials predict the figure will jump to about \$40 million since the WFP was appealing for \$378.2 million in food aid, nearly double the amount requested for 1997.

An official at the Foreign Ministry here said the issue of food aid to North Korea would have some impact on the four-party peace talks between the two Koreas, the United States and China.

"There is no direct link between the two issues, but we can't deny the fact that our reaction will have some impact on the coming four

party talks," the official said.

He said a decision would be reached early next month after close consultation with the United States and Japan later in January.

North Korea had repeatedly demanded more food aid in preparatory meetings that launched the peace process, but the United States and South Korea maintained the relief effort was a separate humanitarian issue. The two Koreas, China and the United States held historic peace talks in Geneva last month to try to replace the current armistice that technically ended the 1950-53 Korean war with a permanent peace treaty.

The four parties are scheduled to hold another round of talks in Geneva on March 16, and an ad hoc committee meeting in Beijing starting Feb. 12.

With agricultural production still crippled by two years of flooding, North Korea was hit last summer by a severe drought and a tidal wave, adding to underlying problems in the economy's agriculture and drastically reducing the harvest, according to the WFP.

The South Korean government source, who is closely related to North Korean affairs here, said Seoul would continue to push for "more and precise monitoring" of the food aid sent to North Korea.

"This is an issue we will continue to push for through the WFP. We need more access to North Korea to actually know where the aid is landing up," he said.

"It is good news that North Korea has allowed more monitors, but that is not enough."

Under an agreement with the WFP, North Korea has agreed to nearly double the number of food monitors to a total of 46 and to open two more offices tasked with overseeing the deliveries.

The United States Tuesday also hinted it may contribute to the latest appeal.

"We will carefully examine this appeal and the United States intends to consult with other countries," State Department spokesman James Rubin said.

"We have always responded positively to appeals for the needy children of North Korea," he noted.

State Department officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said the administration would most likely respond positively to the appeal.

The United States is the largest contributor of food aid to North Korea under the U.N. programme, with last year's funding totalling some \$50 million.

Nobel laureate criticises Australian inaction on East Timor

SYDNEY (AFP) — Nobel laureate Jose Ramos Horta criticised the Australian government Wednesday for failing to use its influence with Indonesia to try to resolve the conflict in his native East Timor.

In an article published in The Sydney Morning Herald, Mr. Horta said he found it sad that Australia had taken little interest in helping find a solution to the plight of the former Portuguese colony invaded by Indonesia in 1975 and annexed the following year.

"As a significant regional power and one that was looked to by other governments for guidance on the East Timor issue, Australia was in a strong position to exert influence over what happened there," he wrote.

"Not only is Australia a close neighbour to East Timor, it is also one that has shared significant parts of our history."

Mr. Horta said he had been heartened by international actions in the last year, including the appointment of a United Nations envoy and the United States Congress' move to prohibit the use of American weapons in East Timor.

"In these circumstances it is sad that the Australian government has chosen to take so little interest in a solution to the matter," he said. The Sydney-based exiled diplomat called on the Australian government to stop training Indonesian officers and engaging in joint exercises with its neighbour's military.

He also again criticised Australia's policy on East Timorese refugees. Australia has sought to exclude some refugees born while East Timor was still a Portuguese territory on the grounds they are Portuguese nationals and could live in that country.

"It seems that whereas our oil may be shared between Australia and Indonesia, our refugees are deemed to be Portugal's problem," Mr. Horta wrote. A spokesman for Australian Foreign Minister Alexander Downer said he would have no comment on Mr. Horta's statements. A representative of East Timor's Fretilin movement before the U.N. since the island's annexation by Indonesia, Mr. Horta shared the 1996 Nobel Peace Prize with Roman Catholic Bishop Carlos Belo.

Writing in the International Herald Tribune last week, Mr. Horta urged his comrades in the East Timorese resistance to pursue a non-violent strategy, but said any ceasefire would depend on a gesture of goodwill by Indonesia.



P.W. Botha, South Africa's last hardline apartheid president, is to be prosecuted for defying a subpoena to appear before the truth commission (Reuters photo)

South Africa's Botha to be prosecuted for snubbing truth panel

CAPE TOWN (AFP) — Former president P.W. Botha will be prosecuted for refusing to testify before South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Western Cape Attorney General Frank Khan said Wednesday.

"I have decided to prosecute. It is necessary in law. Mr. Botha will therefore be prosecuted in the regional court in George," Mr. Khan told a press conference here.

Mr. Botha will not face arrest because of his age and ill health, Mr. Khan said. The former president will appear in court on Jan. 23, and has given an undertaking that he will not try to evade a subpoena which was to be served on him at his home by members of Mr. Khan's staff later Wednesday.

Lawyers for Mr. Botha last Friday handed in a submission to Mr. Khan giving his reasons for snubbing the commission.

The former leader, 82 next Monday, gained the nickname "Great Crocodile" during his iron rule of South Africa from 1979 to 1989. He has labelled the "truth commission" a "circus" and said he believes it wants to humiliate him in public.

The commission wants to question him about abuses under his rule — including cross-border raids, the state's chemical warfare programme, killings of black activists, and the workings of the now-defunct state security council which he headed.

Papon admits that 'had he known' he might have resigned

BORDEAUX, France (AFP) — Maurice Papon, accused of wartime crimes against humanity, admitted for the first time Tuesday that he had known what happened to the Jews during the war, he might have resigned.

"Had I known what finally happened, probably, maybe resigning would have been an honourable solution," Mr. Papon, on trial here since Oct. 8, said.

Mr. Papon is accused of responsibility in the deportation of around 1,500 Jews to Nazi death camps when he was secretary general of the Bordeaux prefecture in charge of "Jewish affairs" from 1942-44.

"But we knew nothing," the former French minister said, apparently contradicting previous declarations he had made.

Mr. Papon said in the past that he knew that the Jews captured in Bordeaux would be sent from the French internment camp in Drancy to a destination outside France.

In November, Mr. Papon also said he knew that a "cruel fate" was awaiting the Jews deported from Bordeaux.

Questioned on these declarations, Mr. Papon said Tuesday that "the meaning of the word cruel is not what we perceive today."

"We did not know everything," he insisted. "I disobeyed with honour" the Vichy regime's orders, Mr. Papon said,

adding that "my (only) interest in the politics of Vichy lay in my trying to sabotage it."

Questioned by Michel Zaoui, lawyer of one of the survivors, on why no documents testify to his acts of disobedience, Mr. Papon said disobedience is never reported in documents.

"There are gaps, and the gaps represent our clandestine activities," he said.

Mr. Papon, who rose to become prefect of the Paris police and budget minister after World War II, faces a raft of charges over the August 1942 trainload of victims, including complicity in detention and murder as well as the principal accusation against him: that of crimes against humanity.

Freezing rain cuts power in 750,000 Quebec homes

MONTREAL (AFP) — A severe winter storm Tuesday cut power in 750,000 homes in south-west Quebec — a record 25 per cent of the provincial power authority's customers — and temporarily closed a major highway.

Freezing rain, which began falling late Monday, left a coating of ice several centimetres thick and closed most schools in the Montreal region as well as many businesses and restaurants.

Some municipalities

opened shelters for people until their power was restored.

Pedestrians had to move with extreme caution as sidewalks were covered with a 30-millimetre layer of ice.

The ice encrusted on car windshields was so thick that the plastic scrapers normally used had to be replaced by metal instruments.

Some cars were dented when ice-coated branches fell on them and a number of road accidents across the

Cambodia drops expulsion threat against Western journalist

PHNOM PENH (AFP) — The Cambodian government Wednesday dropped its threat to expel a Western television correspondent for allegedly unfair reporting.

Secretary of State for Information Khieu Kanharith said veteran Canadian journalist Ed Fitzgerald of Asia Business News (ABN) would be allowed to remain and work in Cambodia and an order to revoke his visa would be dropped.

"Ed Fitzgerald can continue his work here," he said after a closed-door meeting with the correspondent. "His visa will not be revoked and his press credentials will be extended."

Khieu Kanharith would not disclose details of the meeting but said that Mr. Fitzgerald and the Singapore-based television network had offered the government a chance to respond to reports which it deemed unfair.

"They will offer an opportunity for us to respond," he said, referring to a critical 30-minute "Year in Review" piece that ABN aired repeatedly

in late December, which was reported by Fitzgerald.

Khieu Kanharith made mention of the apology which he had originally demanded from Mr. Fitzgerald as a precondition for rescinding the revocation order.

Mr. Fitzgerald, 50, is dean of the foreign press corps in Phnom Penh and declined to give specific details of the meeting but said it was conducted in the spirit of free exchange of information.

"I said we would endeavour to offer him an opportunity to express his point of view on ABN's coverage," he said.

The meeting was held in the spirit of free exchange of information (open access and ability to operate) without fear, he said.

Khieu Kanharith objected to the "Year in Review" piece, among other things, for critical look at Cambodia's judicial system, questioning whether it was fair and impartial by citing cases which observers have deemed to be politically motivated.

Britain to announce measures for cut in European air pollution

LONDON (AFP) — Britain was due to announce its plans for a Europe-wide cut in air pollution later Wednesday.

Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott, writing in the Financial Times, said he wanted to use the British presidency of the European Union to push for tougher standards to reduce traffic fumes from hauliers, bus operators and motorists.

Motor fumes make up some of the greenhouse gases held to be responsible for warming the earth's atmosphere, and Mr. Prescott, who represented Britain at the recent international summit on climate change in Kyoto, Japan, wants to tackle summer city smogs at a round of key sum-

mits.

"What we started in Japan has to be seen through," he wrote. "It falls to us to lead EU in implementing the Kyoto agreement."

The Kyoto agreement, legally-binding until 2002, calls for a 5.2 per cent cut in greenhouse gases by 2008 to 2012.

Visitors to the Athens know what the London and Birmingham know all too well: we can go on with congestion and let alone in the future," Mr. Prescott.

Concern over a rising number of asthma cases and other respiratory problems has prompted such measures.

Britain's EU presidency began on Jan. 1.

Fiji group on alert as cyclone moves closer

SUVA (AFP) — Western and southern parts of Fiji were placed on alert Wednesday as a powerful cyclone Susan, heading up hurricane force winds of more than 200 kilometres an hour, moved closer to the island group.

At noon Wednesday, the cyclone was 500 kilometres west of Suva, moving south at a speed of 20 kilometres an hour, the meteorological department forecasters said.

The cyclone, expected to be the most intense to hit the region, was expected to reach Suva within 48 hours after telephone lines were opened for reser-

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Taiwan's to see signs of Taipei-Beijing

TAIPEI (AFP) — Taiwan's negotiator Wednesday said signs of thawing in the long-running disputes between the two sides over the past year, a factor developed for the direction regarding the Strait.

Mr. Koo acknowledged the problems, such as the exchange of information, access and ability to operate (open access and ability to operate) without fear, he said.

Khieu Kanharith objected to the "Year in Review" piece, among other things, for critical look at Cambodia's judicial system, questioning whether it was fair and impartial by citing cases which observers have deemed to be politically motivated.

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World News

Taiwan's top negotiator sees signs of thaw in Taipei-Beijing ties

TAIPEI (AFP) — Taiwan's top negotiator Wednesday saw signs of thawing in Taipei-Beijing ties and urged China to resume talks despite disputes over the revocation order.

Mr. Fitzgerald, dean of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said in a speech to a seminar on economic ties between Taiwan, Hong Kong and Shanghai.

The SEF was set up in 1991 to handle civil contacts between the two sides in the absence of official relations.

Mr. Koo acknowledged many problems, such as smuggling of drugs and firearms as well as fisheries disputes, that have arisen since the commencement of civil contacts in the late 1980s.

"These problems have had impacts on the well-being of people on the two

sides and need to be tackled via negotiations," Mr. Koo said.

Beijing unilaterally called off talks with Taipei in mid-1995 in retaliation against Taiwanese President Lee Teng-hui's historic U.S. visit.

Beijing, which regards Taiwan as a renegade province, insisted that the trip was part of the nationalist island's bid to split from the "motherland."

But political observers here have noticed that Beijing seems to have softened its stance and has started talking about reopening negotiations with Taipei.

But Taiwanese Premier Vincent Siew Tuesday also complained that China had set up "one China" as a precondition for the resumption of talks as he appealed to Beijing to return to the negotiation table.

Taipei wants reunification but not on Beijing's terms — which would be similar to the "one country, two systems" used to reclaim Hong Kong from British rule last July.



Paula Jones (right) enters a news conference with her attorneys Donovan Campbell (center) and Brent Perry to announce an internal investigation by the Treasury Department into the circumstances of Jones and her husband's IRS audit (Reuters photo)

Treasury Department probes reasons for audit of Paula Jones

LONG BEACH, California (AFP) — Treasury Department investigators are probing why Paula Jones, the woman who has accused President Bill Clinton of sexual harassment, was subjected to a tax audit, her attorney announced.

Donovan Campbell of Dallas, Texas, said late Tuesday that department agents were investigating the timing of how and why Mrs. Paula and her husband, Steven Jones, were chosen for an Internal Revenue Service (IRS) audit.

Her attorney held a late night news conference immediately after a two-hour meeting with representatives from the Treasury Department's Inspector General's Office.

The department is investigating the possibility of improper political motives in the IRS audit of Mrs. Jones' tax returns, and possible deficiencies in the audit process itself, Mr. Campbell said.

Because of a judge's prior gag order, Mr. Campbell said Mrs. Jones would not answer any questions, but he issued a statement attributed to her.

"We can only hope that these investigators will be allowed to conduct this inquiry diligently, vigorously, and without outside pressure from political sources," Mrs. Jones said in the statement.

"If the investigation reveals wrongdoing on the part of any government official," she added, "we trust that appropriate legal action will be taken against any perpetrators, no matter how high their government positions."

The timing of the news conference precluded getting comments from either the White House or the Treasury Department, allowing Mrs. Jones to dominate media coverage.

Mr. Campbell said the notice of an audit came days after Mrs. Jones rejected a \$700,000 settlement offer because it was not accompanied by an apology from Mr. Clinton, and after Mr. Clinton's attorneys began pretrial discovery.

"Put all that those facts together, and the timetable together, and it might be the cause for the timing of the

Hong Kong sets up task force to tackle bird flu crisis

HONG KONG (AFP) — The Hong Kong government has set up a task force to handle the bird flu crisis here amid mounting public criticism of its mishandling of the scare, a spokesman said Wednesday.

Following last week's botched chicken cull, Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa has moved to stem concern by appointing Acting Chief Secretary for Administration Michael Suen as head of the inter-departmental force.

Mr. Suen is expected to coordinate action on the crisis with the priority on public health, the spokesman said.

The huge co-ordination role was initially designated to Chief Secretary Anson Chan, but she is to head to the United States in a few days after returning Wednesday from a three-day visit to Beijing.

The latest move comes as the outbreak of chicken flu

also began to hit the territory's ailing tourist industry, despite the mass slaughter of 1.5 million chickens to stop the spread of the virus.

Four people have so far died from the flu, and 16 others have been confirmed as suffering from the illness caused by the H5N1 virus.

Mr. Tung demanded that all departments ensure acceptable sanitary conditions in poultry farms and poultry import and retail outlets, saying urgent measures were needed before chicken imports could resume.

He also called for a review of the present arrangements for slaughtering poultry in markets to eliminate the risk of contamination.

It followed three days of protests by poultry farmers and traders, whose livelihoods have been wrecked by the slaughter, as well as a ban on chicken imports from China which will remain in place for the next four weeks.

The traders have slammed the planned compensation package, which runs up to multi-million dollars, as insufficient.

The mass chicken cull, which began on Dec. 28, is estimated to have cost chicken breeders and retailers some 10 million HK dollars (\$1.2 million).

The government came under fire for the cull, when some chickens pecked their way out of sacks in which they were being gassed, while the carcasses of others were left abandoned and scavenged by dogs and rats.

But the World Health Organisation said in Geneva Tuesday that Hong Kong cats and dogs which may have come into contact with contaminated chickens should not be killed.

Mr. Tung has personally admitted there were inadequacies in the government's response, and politicians have blamed the government for failing to inform the public immediately about the full extent of the outbreak.

The bird flu scare has also prompted neighbouring countries such as Thailand and Philippines to screen visitors from Hong Kong. In addition, tourists from Japan and Taiwan have dropped plans to visit Hong Kong, officials said.

The WHO and other centres have been trying to identify the virus' reservoir — the habitat where the flu can breed without killing.

Over 1,850 blood samples have been taken by the WHO and Hong Kong University from 12 species of birds and animals, mainly geese, ducks, quails and small rodents who can harbour the virus without dying, unlike chickens.

The first results will be available in a few days, according to the WHO.

Human failure blamed for Indian train crash, toll 49

NEW DELHI (AFP) — Indian authorities Wednesday blamed "human failure" for a horrific train crash two days ago which killed 49 people and injured 62 others in the north of the country.

A railway spokesman said: "We have found 49 bodies and these are awaiting identification."

He said they were being kept at a hospital near the accident site at Haridwar, nearly 300 kilometers south-east of New Delhi.

The official said rail traffic disrupted by the late Monday accident was restored Wednesday after the tracks were cleared of the wreckage.

The accident occurred when a passenger train travelling at 60 kilometers per hour rammed into a train which had halted after running over an animal believed to be a deer to dense fog.

At least 10 cars of the two trains were mangled, and thrown off the tracks after the collision, which brought police and hundreds of villagers rushing to the site.

The spokesman said the driver of the speeding train overshot a railway signal.

"Prima facie, it appears to be a case of human failure," he said. "The driver of the (speeding) train and his assistant are among the 16 people who have suffered grievous injuries."

Many of the dead were in a "unreserved" car of the stationary car which did not have a mandatory passenger list, the spokesman said, adding: "So identification of the bodies is posing a serious problem."

Some 1,500 people were reportedly on board the two trains.

Three years ago, more than 300 passengers were killed and 400 others injured when a New Delhi-bound express crashed into a train that had stopped after hitting a stray cow near the Taj Mahal town of Agra.

Rogue kangaroo attacks Australian picnickers

MELBOURNE, Australia (AFP) — An Australian woman was injured by a rare attack by a rogue kangaroo which left her thigh ripped almost to the bone, hospital officials said here Wednesday.

Christine Eaton, 39, of suburban Melbourne, was injured while shielding a friend's two-year-old son from the kangaroo which appeared from the bush around the Cardinia Reservoir where the group was picnicking Tuesday and knocked the boy down.

Ms. Eaton told reporters she turned her back to the kangaroo to pick up the boy and the animal rested its forepaws on her back, reared back on its tail and kicked with its feet, gouging a deep gash on her woman's lower leg and scratching her back.

"It was coming forward and I turned... because I

knew it was going to jump at me," Ms. Eaton told Channel Nine news from her hospital bed. "I couldn't believe it really."

Ms. Eaton was treated and released at Dandenong Hospital for the gash. The child was left with minor scratches from the attack and was not seriously injured, according to authorities.

Mr. Eaton was philosophical about the attack, pointing out that she and her friends had ventured into the animal's natural territory. She would not be returning to the park, however, she said. The kangaroo, Australia's national symbol, is a normally peace-loving marsupial — a mammal which carries its young in a pouch.

"Those sorts of attacks are not common," a zoo official said.

princess's death.

All entry tickets for the weekends and for the first and last days of the viewing period have been sold out, an Althorp spokesman said Tuesday.

The tickets cost 9.50 pounds (\$15) making them the most expensive on Britain's stately home circuit, including Buckingham Palace.

Over a quarter of tickets for Diana tomb sold in first 48 hours

LONDON (AFP) — More than a quarter of the tickets which will allow admirers of the late Diana Princess of Wales to view her burial place next summer, were sold in the first 48 hours after telephone lines were opened for reservations.

About 40,000 of the 150,000 tickets were snapped up by amateurs despite their

Sinn Fein urges London to respond to loyalists' demands

BELFAST (AFP) — Sinn Fein, the political wing of the IRA, asked the British government Wednesday to respond to Protestant demands for the early release of loyalist prisoners who have called on their representatives to withdraw from the Northern Ireland peace process.

The party's chief negotiator Martin McGuinness told BBC Radio that he agreed with the loyalists' claims that they were being treated unfairly. The pro-British loyalists have complained about concessions made by London and Dublin to the Catholic side which they see

as aimed at keeping Sinn Fein at the negotiating table and ensuring the IRA maintains its ceasefire.

Mr. McGuinness said: "I believe that loyalist and republican prisoners imprisoned by the British government should be released and I think that they have got some cause for complaint."

"I hope that the British government would recognise that they too should be as imaginative as the Irish government has been in releasing prisoners prior to Christmas."

He said he thought this would be a major benefit to the process.

The present difficulties were due to Protestant and Unionist parties playing against the process, he said.

Ulster's Progressive Unionist Party leader David Ervine said Wednesday that the IRA had been "given sweeties" to remain in the negotiations and that Britain was running a "parallel peace process" for the republicans.

Mr. Ervine, who was meeting Irish Foreign Minister David Andrews in Belfast Wednesday, said that in the present circumstances his party would not take part in the peace negotiations which are scheduled to resume Monday.

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Message from the people

ACCORDING TO an opinion poll conducted recently by the University of Jordan's Centre for Strategic Studies, 80 per cent of Jordanians still view Israel as an enemy state despite the fact that three years have passed on the ratification of the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty. This finding tells us basically how shallow the peace process has become in the light of the repeated setbacks that it has sustained since the rise to power of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu 18 months ago. Compare the results of the new poll to an earlier one conducted by the same centre right after the Washington Declaration of 1994, in which there was much support for the impending treaty, and the inevitable conclusion will be that the sense of optimism of those days have now dissipated almost completely. With only about eight per cent of Jordanians viewing Jordanian-Israeli relations as good, there is little doubt that all is not well with the peace process not only on the Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese fronts but also on the Jordanian track as well. Equally important in this vein is that the increasing Jordanian disappointment with the peace effort is shared by both East Bankers as well as by Jordanians of Palestinian origin.

As for the Palestinian people, who are the most affected by the faltering peace process, the story is not different. According to a parallel opinion poll taken by the Nablus-based Centre for Palestinian Research and Studies (CPRS), Palestinians are growingly becoming more pessimistic about the future and no longer have high hopes that the current Israeli government is serious about their rights.

There is a clear message in these findings, especially to the Israeli leadership. Its hopes for cultivating warm peace with one Arab country at the expense of another is not possible, judging by the size of the Jordanian constituency that still regards Israel as an enemy. Which proves the proposition that in order for peace to survive and make strides forward, it needs to be comprehensive and just.

There is a crucial lesson for the Israelis to learn here. Judging by the way the right-wing ruling coalition thinks, however, they will typically view the poll's results as another indication that the Arabs do not want peace with them.

It is a vicious cycle which can be broken only by moderate and peace-loving Israelis voting their right-wing government out of office.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Aswaq's Yahya Mahmoud expressed support for international intervention in Algeria to put an end to the horrible massacres of the civilian population. As long as the Algerian government has proved impotent in stopping the slaughter of innocent villagers and as long as the Arab and Islamic countries fail to bring relief to the people through their mediation or other means it is logical to look towards the world community to extend a helping hand to the helpless Algerians, said the writer. By keeping silent about the massacres and by failing to bring the murderers to justice the Algerian government's behaviour is tantamount to being an accomplice to the crime, Mahmoud said. The whole world has condemned the killings of innocent civilians, but little has been done to put an end to the tragedy of the Algerians who have faced years of barbaric actions by gangs of criminals including those who call themselves Islamists, said the writer. He said that although it is regrettable that the Arab and Islamic World could not muster enough courage to help deal with the situation collectively, one can only hope that the world's major powers can lend a helping hand to the Algerian people.

Al Ra'i's Hussein Abu Rumman said David Levy's resignation as foreign minister of Israel is timely and could help bring down the Israeli cabinet. Rumman said Levy chose to abandon ship rather than face, along with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the final collapse of the coalition government, which is bound to come sooner or later, he added. Levy's departure, said the writer, will further deepen the splits within the ruling coalition in Israel and can precipitate the fall of this government which has openly worked against peace to the region. The resignation shows that Netanyahu can no longer honour his commitments or keep his promises to the small parties in the coalition and sooner or later he will default, prompting these parties to withdraw their support for the Likud-led government, according to the writer. But on the other hand, Rumman said, Levy's resignation could harden Netanyahu's stand vis-a-vis the Oslo accord and over the question of redeployment of Israeli forces in the Palestinian lands, and the prime minister could find in Levy's resignation an excuse to indefinitely delay any withdrawal from Palestinian territories.

View from Academia

The need for more regulatory smoking measures

By Dr. Ahmad Y. Majdoubeh

AT A TIME when many countries in the world are zeroing in on smoking, as a problem facing both those who indulge in the habit and those who do not but are nonetheless involved, stricter regulatory measures against smoking need to be adopted and enforced more rigorously than they are at this point. "Regulatory" here is the key word; for while we respect the right of those who, intentionally or helplessly, choose not to give up the hazardous habit, we want to minimise the risks involved for the active smokers themselves as well as (more urgently) for the so-called passive smokers.

We are amply aware of the progress that has been made in our society with respect to the matter at hand. There are many governmental and non-governmental organisations which have been speaking eloquently about the subject and doing highly commendable work. The prevention of smoking in many places (the places of worship, the libraries, the classroom, some governmental establishments, some governmental and private public-transport vehicles, etc.) is an excellent idea.

Furthermore, public awareness regarding the risks implied has increased noticeably over the years. Most people, including those who indulge in the habit, realise the negative impact of smoking. More importantly in this particular context, there has been, oxymoronically, a decreasing level of people's fascination, acceptance and tolerance of the habit. Aside from adolescents and a minority of individuals, no one thinks it "cool" to smoke anymore. "I am hooked to this habit" is the typical (apologetic) answer given by most who smoke when asked about why they smoke.

Having said this, however, we must emphasise that smoking does still pose a problem to many, especially to the "passive" smokers — children, housewives, employees of sorts, passengers, clients, shoppers, etc. On some means of transportation, smoking is a real nuisance. Try to take the "service" from Abdali (in Amman) to Irbid. Chances are there will be at least one or two smoking pas-

segers on the one-hour trip (in addition to the driver himself). The same applies to the small buses. And the same applies to the four-hour Amman-Aqaba "service"-trip. Unless the driver happens to be against smoking (most drivers themselves smoke), whoever wishes to smoke on these trips can do so.

But one encounters discomfort and health-hazards in cafés, restaurants, supermarkets, wedding halls, most governmental institutions, most private companies, banks. And the problem exists in most homes.

Aside from the health risks and the discomfort, there is the problem of what we call "embarrassment" in Arabic (ihraj). If you happen to find smoking annoying (for whatever reason), you find it difficult (i.e., embarrassing) to ask people not to smoke — be it when you are at home entertaining guests or at work receiving visits from friends or clients of sorts. Our culture (whether we like it or not) emphasises politeness, courtesy, chivalry, and hospitality a bit too much, and it would be (among many) considered impolite, un-courteous, un-chivalric and inhospitable if you ask people not to smoke. In most cases, you let your smoking guests get away with it.

But the problem goes even beyond embarrassment — to trouble, at times. Suppose you are taking the "service" to Irbid or Aqaba, and you do not tolerate smoking. The driver and a couple of passengers are smoking heavily, with the windows closed or slightly open (it is winter and cold). What would you do? Ask them politely to put off the cigarettes. You do, but they decline politely. You believe in being assertive about your rights. What then? Well, you need to muster all macho tone-of-voice skills you have acquired over the years. What if that does not work and you can't hack out? Well, then you have to resort to whatever fighting skills (karate, martial arts, boxing, wrestling, hitting, scratching, etc.) you have acquired over the years — assuming that you have acquired any, for in most cases you haven't.

Clearly, two things are required. The first is the adop-

tion and enforcement of laws against smoking in public areas (closed areas, that is, or those with little ventilation) and on all means of transportation. It is heartening when you visit the American embassy, for example, and find employees who smoke, smoking outside buildings. If the American Embassy can do it, our public institutions, especially those which offer services to hundreds of people in closed rooms, can do it. They ought to do it. The matter is too serious to be left to the whimsical habits of individual employers and employees, drivers and passengers, and civil servants and clients, etc.

The second is the launching of more campaigns (more so than we have been doing), through the media and other means at our disposal, against smoking. Campaigns will not only (we hope) make people more aware of the damage and discomfort involved but, more importantly and urgently perhaps, empower polite, courteous, hospitable or chivalrous hosts to say no to smoking, be it in their homes or offices.

I am not a smoker, though once in a while I smoke a cigarette, a cigar or a hookah; and I am more tolerant than many people of smokers and smoking. And I understand the pleasure smoking gives some people. Furthermore, one does not wish to deprive people who either like smoking or are addicted to it from enjoying smoking. But one wishes for people who smoke to smoke when and where they do not harm or annoy others. Smoke in open areas!

I liked it the other day when a foreign TV channel was interviewing smokers (the guilty party!) about what ought to be done, and they said they were all for regulating the habit and for prohibiting smokers from smoking in closed areas or areas with little ventilation.

Many smokers in our part of the world are considerate individuals; they do not need laws to tell them when and where to smoke. But many are inconsiderate, and they need to be strictly told when and where to smoke. Let's encourage good smoking habits and prohibit bad ones (or had consequences) through stricter regulatory laws.

'Just the flu'? Beware, influenza can be a big killer

By Robin Marantz Henig

WASHINGTON — While researching a book about emerging viruses in the early 1990s, I asked the same question of every virologist I interviewed: What would be the next plague? The answer was almost invariably influenza.

Such an answer was not especially interesting, I discovered, to most people. Influenza was too familiar, too intimately known as "just the flu." Generating widespread concern about its power as a global threat was as hard as creating interest in the power of asthma, another hidden killer.

The recent outbreak of Hong Kong "bird flu" has focused new attention on the threat of influenza. It's about time.

Since my book came out five years ago, I have watched in frustration as influenza was relegated to the back pages while the media agonised over outbreaks that were more dramatic but of far less importance to the public health — outbreaks such as bubonic plague in India and Ebola virus in Zaire. The flu sends people to bed for a week or two, and then they get better. Almost everyone eventually recovers, little the worse for wear.

For all its familiarity and apparent harmlessness, though, influenza has always been a killer. Even in a normal year, complications kill 10,000 to 20,000 Americans, most of them aged or chronically ill. In an unusual year, influenza presents the most imminent viral threat to people on the planet. That is why the new strain emerging in Hong Kong frightens me so much.

The last devastating influenza pandemic occurred in the winter of 1918-19. ("Pandemic" refers to a higher than expected rate of disease occurring on several continents at once.) Before the dreadful winter was over, 2 billion people around the world had come down with influenza. An estimated 20 million to 40 million died.

The pandemic caused more death and destruction in one six-month period than any other in any comparable period, before or since — more than the Black Death of the 14th century, more than the smallpox of

the 16th century.

We like to believe that whatever was killing people so ruthlessly in 1918 must certainly be something we can treat by now. It is true, of course, that modern medicine has given us an influenza vaccine, an anti-influenza drug (amantadine), and plenty of antibiotics to prevent or treat secondary bacterial infections. But during the 1918 debacle many victims were felled far too quickly to be treated. One man, for instance, got on a stretcher feeling well enough to go to work, rode six blocks, and died.

Vaccines must be concocted more than nine months before the flu season begins, based on an educated guess of what strains of virus will be circulating. The current flu vaccine offers no protection at all against bird flu, because no one could see it coming.

Against a virus that can spread and kill so rapidly, all the anti-viral vaccines and drugs in the world would be virtually impotent.

The virus responsible for the Hong Kong deaths and chicken slaughter contains a unique combination of proteins on its outer shell that renders it unrecognisable to the human immune system — and therefore able to wreak its havoc before the body, even a previously young and healthy body, knows what hit it.

The influenza virus is a masterful quick-change artist. It changes the outer proteins on its shell, known as antigens, easily. The changes occur because the influenza virus lacks the genetic "proofreading" ability seen in many more stable viruses.

When it makes an error in reproducing its own genetic material, the influenza virus passes along these errors to progeny. Even a tiny error becomes permanent — or as permanent as a mutable agent like the flu virus is likely to become.

This misplaced information can lead to a minor change in the outer coat, a change known as "antigenic drift." The change is slight but significant. It is as though the virus took off its purple coat and put on a red one. The body can recognise the new virus as familiar, but the difference in

colour alone means that its anti-purple antibodies will no longer be quite enough.

Antigenic drift occurs every year or so, rendering any prior immunity to influenza, whether acquired naturally or through a vaccine, ineffective after a very short time.

Someone who received a flu shot in 1997 will have little immunological memory for the slightly changed influenza virus encountered in 1999.

That is why the flu vaccine must be given annually, and why it is possible to come down with influenza (as opposed to chicken pox, which you can only get once) even though you have had it before.

A major change to the virus's surface antigens is something else altogether. It goes far beyond replacing a purple coat with a red one. This change, known as "antigenic shift," is more like taking off the virus's purple coat and putting on a white tunic, green scarf and spangly orange cloak.

Everything is different, and the immune system fails to recognise the virus altogether. After an antigenic shift, a pandemic almost inevitably follows.

Antigenic shift has happened three times in this century. What is going on now in Hong Kong may be the fourth.

Animals are almost always involved in the process.

And in each of the three pandemics — the 1918 outbreak, the "Asian flu" of 1957 and the "Hong Kong flu" of 1968 — the new influenza strain originated in Asia, most likely somewhere in China.

China breeds many new flu strains because it has so many ducks. By some counts, it has more wild ducks than people. Ducks are the main reservoir for human influenza virus; they can carry it without getting sick.

When ducks are near other animals that are also flu reservoirs, as happens often on Chinese farms, the different viruses have a chance to combine. New hybrid viruses, known as "reassortants," may then emerge.

Reassortants emerge fairly often, but it is only rarely — three or four times in this century — that the hybrid turns out to be capable of infecting humans. That is what

seems to have happened in Hong Kong this year.

On the farms in mainland China where 80 per cent of Hong Kong's chickens originate, fish farming puts ducks and barnyard animals near each other in ponds dug to breed fish. When a duck lands on the pond and defecates, or takes in water through its cloaca, it is exposed to the pig manure often used as fish food in the same pond.

The result: The animal viruses can combine in the duck intestine, and the resulting chimera — part-duck, part-swine, maybe part-human — is an entirely new influenza virus.

This new virus, if it circulates at all, usually circulates only among animals.

The same bird flu, known scientifically as H5N1, arose in Pennsylvania in 1983 and raged through poultry flocks in the region so quickly that all the chickens in the state had to be killed. It erupted in Mexico in 1994, and again in 1995. But in none of these poultry outbreaks was H5N1 ever able to infect humans — even farmers who had close contact with the dead or dying birds.

Today's H5N1 influenza seems to be different. It is capable of making people sick. No one yet knows exactly how H5N1 has changed, but it apparently has.

Why make a fuss when the number of infected humans is so small? This is precisely the right time to make a fuss. The last global influenza pandemic, in 1968, began with a single case: within five months it had spread around the world and killed more than 45,000 people. Coincidentally, that pandemic also began in Hong Kong.

The general public is now gradually learning what the scientific community has been trying to tell us for years: That all our medical sophistication is still relatively helpless in the face of the elusive tactics of our deadliest enemy.

The writer is a Washington, D.C.-based medical writer and the author of "A Dancing Matrix: How Science Confronts Emerging Viruses." The above article is reprinted from the International Herald Tribune.

LETTERS

No fear of competition

To the editor:

DR. YUSUF Mansur's recent column (Jordan Times, Jan. 1, 1998), "Economic Review," "The pluses of being small and efficient" is both unfair and unrealistic.

His view that Jordanian industrialists look or dream as he puts it of "inputs would be imported duty free and foreign goods would be heavily taxed" shows, as I see it, a lack of knowledge and understanding of Jordanian industries and the problems they face.

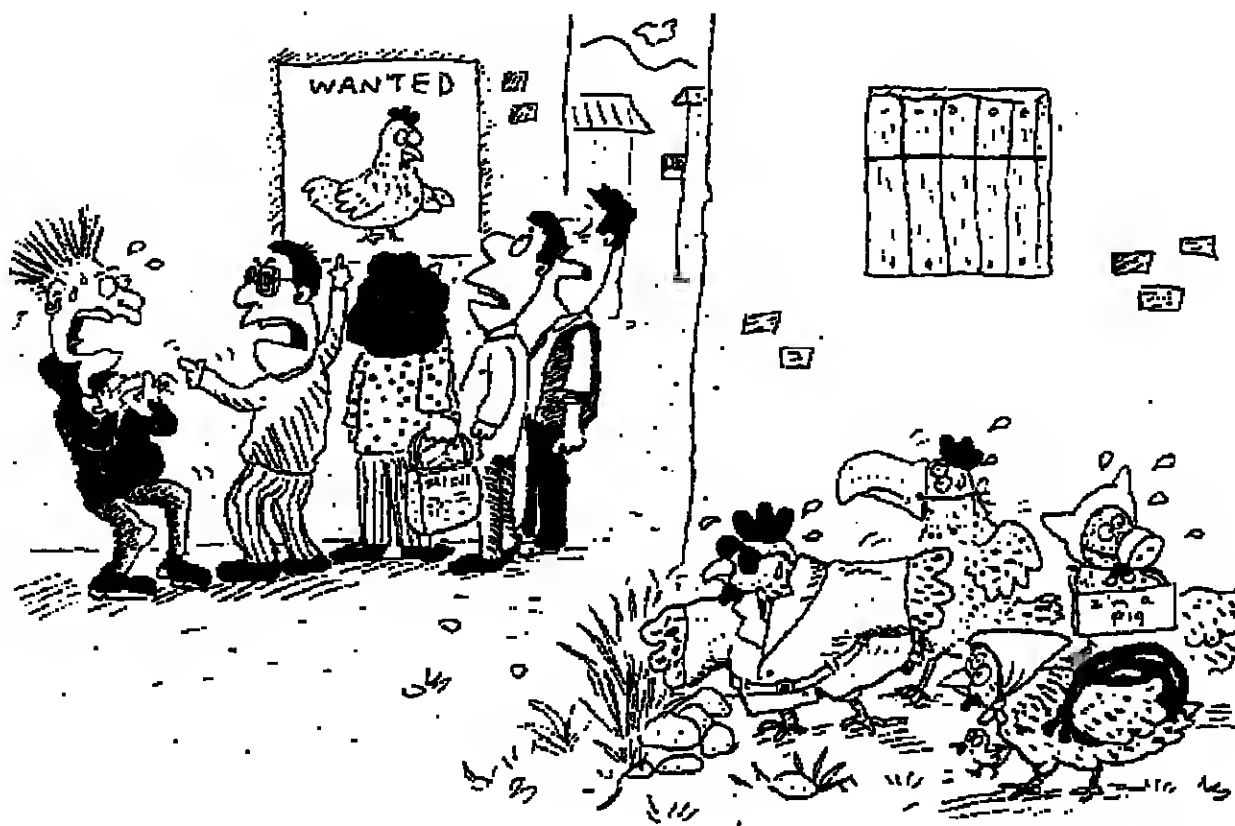
All industrialists simply realise that competition is good and sooner or later Jordan will have to open its doors fully to the world markets.

We are not afraid of competition if it is done fairly. I mean if Jordan is to reduce its tariffs on imported finished goods the same should be done to inputs (i.e., products and raw materials that go into manufacturing), the Kingdom should also have anti-dumping laws to make it more fair for some industries that suffer the might of price reductions by huge European or American firms.

Dr. Mansur believes that Jordanian industries are inefficient and the people that run them are old fashioned, whereby they look for everything that is easy, (i.e., protectionism and a carefree attitude of what this will lead to).

I assure him that the above is not true and urge him to look closer and understand the issues in question before unleashing such wild accusations that do nobody any good.

Marwan Nassar
 General Manager
 Jordan Rubber Industries
 Amman



Society on the move Throwing in the towel

Akram Masarweh has decided to hang up one of his hats. The secretary general of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities will resign his post of three years in mid-March. Mr. Masarweh, who has served under several ministers, said that as he will turn 60 on Jan. 15 he would like to take his own decisions and follow his own career. He plans to devote his time entirely to the Jerash Festival of Culture and Arts which he has directed since 1983. Of the Ministry of Tourism he said he enjoyed the work very much and felt good about the many achievements made in the tourism sector during his tenure. Prior to his appointment to the tourism ministry, he was an advisor to the minister of youth. His earlier career spanned public service, teaching, sports for the disabled, and of course, culture and art. That Mr. Masarweh will mark his 60th birthday next week was met with disbelief by the officials around him. Other than the who will succeed Mr. Masarweh at the ministry, the question most frequently being asked in these circles is what is the secret to his youth.



Akram Masarweh

that she will have to work triply hard as secretary general, facing many challenges and certainly the scrutiny of being placed under a microscope, as she herself describes it. Besides seeking to advance the work of this ministry, she intends to set a good example as a professional woman. Ms. Bakir is already doing her homework, having asked for material and even holding a meeting with ministry staff in her HCST office. As to who might succeed her at the Higher Council, Secretary General Dr. Osama Khalidi is presently considering restructuring the general secretariat, and thus it is too early to tell.

GRAND OPENING: The official opening of Jordan's first embassy in Malaysia was applauded by all those invited.



Jordanian Badia soldier serves Arabic coffee to Ambassador Abdul Ilah Al Kurdi and the Malaysian foreign minister in Kuala Lumpur

not least of which were the numerous members of Kuala Lumpur's Jordanian expatriate community. Although the late December ceremony hosted by Ambassador Abdul Ilah Al Kurdi and his wife Fawzieh drew a crowd of about 200 guests including senior Malaysian officials, among them the foreign minister, members of the diplomatic corps, and Malaysian and Jordanian businesspersons, it was the homecooked Jordanian dishes prepared under the culinary guidance of Mrs. Kurdi that had the Jordanian's making a beeline for the buffet. Mr. Kurdi, former deputy director of the General Intelligence Department, took up his first ambassadorial post in early September. The Kurdis have three children: Leith (23) has recently been employed by Merrill Lynch in Bahrain, Doula (20) is working towards her degree in law at the University of Jordan, and Ali (16) is with his parents and attending high school in Malaysia.

HURRAH: A planning committee of the Ministry of Education will discuss this coming Wednesday the novel idea of appointing women as directors of public schools for boys.



Her Majesty Queen Noor Wednesday welcomes guests from several Jordanian women's organisations to an iftar she hosted at Basman Palace

Braving all odds, Minister of Education Munther Masri intends to see his determination to place the right people in the right post regardless of their sex. Boys' schools have historically been directed by men. But many girls' schools have had men directors as well as men teachers.

ON A NEW WAVE: Columnist, publisher and friend of archaeology Rami Khouri has taken on a new media venture. This time it's radio. Unlike his television talk-show programme Encounter, the radio programme will feature Khouri chatting to his English-speaking listeners on medium, short-wave and F.M. frequencies, about archaeological sites in Jordan, related ancient cultures and their links to the modern day region. The programme, called Jordan: Ancient Cultures, will air one featured subject for about 15 minutes three times a week: on Saturdays following the 10:00 a.m. news, Sundays at 4:30 p.m. and Mondays at 5:30 p.m. The idea is to bring the programme to a large international audience as well in order to help in the promotion of tourism to the country. Khouri intends to highlight Jordan's ancient cultures to reinforce the idea that the way we live today is the cumulative impact of last 10,000 years of cultures and civilisations, and thus make for a better understanding of what is taking place today. There will also be occasional interviews with principals in the field, and even some field reporting. Naturally, Khouri will try to appeal to a wide audience and apply a chatty informal tone to the programme.

DOHA DOINGS: Also taking on a new media horizon is Jordan Television's Channel 2 Director of Programming

Rima Azar. Azar, who started in radio as a programme presenter, then a news editor and newscaster, is leaving to Doha, Qatar to join the recently established Al Jazeera satellite news network. With plans to expand and extend its broadcast hours, and thus offer news documentaries and magazine programmes, the network will tap Azar's expertise in these arenas, making her director of programming. Azar, who will start her new job in early February, says she is looking forward to the change, but is leaving Jordan Television with mixed feelings having spent many years there and making many good friends. The move she said, is a step she has to take.

TECH CHECK: Montreal's Concordia University President Frederick Levy, Vice Rector Jack Lightstone, Dean of Engineering Nabil Ismail and Chairman of the Mechanical Engineering Department Akif Bulca are arriving in Jordan as the last of Jordan University for Science and Technology President Saad Hijazi and Vice President Ahmad Abu Alhaja. The visiting team is here to check on a joint project in manufacturing technology started three years ago and to look for new areas of cooperation. While in Jordan the professors will meet with Minister of Higher Education Munther Masri and other senior officials.

Jennifer Hamarneh

ANOTHER FIRST: Making a doubly significant move is Nancy Bakir, assistant secretary general for administrative and financial affairs of the Higher Council for Science and Technology. Ms. Bakir will succeed Ali Sheikh, who has decided to retire, as secretary general of the Ministry of Social Development, thus making her the first woman to hold a secretary general post in the government. The appointment will be sealed upon the issuance of a Royal Decree. Ms. Bakir's colleagues say she is very forthcoming, an excellent administrator and is "real cool." A graduate of the former Soviet Union, Ms. Bakir took post graduate courses at Boston University and returned to Jordan in 1984 to take up her previous post at the Council for Higher Education. A year later when the government established the Ministry of Higher Education, she and her colleagues moved to the new ministry. She joined the HCST when it was first being established and has remained there ever since. She expects



Nancy Bakir

chip talk



Protect yourself

By Jean-Claude Elias

UNTIL TECHNOLOGY comes up with a better alternative, computers will need electricity to work. As advanced and sophisticated they may become, the machines won't even blink without the electric current. Just like our bodies need blood to function and like cars require fuel to run, computers depend on electricity. And it better be of good quality.

Computers in general and PCs in particular must be supplied with power that fulfills certain characteristics. Voltage and frequency must have given values and should remain as close as possible to these values. Jordan functions on 220 volts and 50 hertz frequency. A personal computer will tolerate some variations of these values but always within limits. Whereas a fluctuation of 10 volts (plus or minus) may be acceptable, higher changes may adversely affect the functioning of the machine and could even damage it.

Power used by computers must also be "clean." That is to say unaffected by other machinery like photocopiers, elevators and other power-hungry equipment. Indeed, such machines introduce disturbances called electrical noise, and may therefore harm any PC connected to the same outlet. There are many other power problems, ranging from complete failure to minor surges, that we do not need to detail further here.

How do we rate the current that is supplied to offices and households in Jordan? Overall it is good, although the quality slightly varies from one area to another. This relatively good quality, however, is a problem in itself. In countries where power failures often occur, users don't think twice. They systematically insert devices like regulators, power conditioners or UPS (Uninterruptible Power Supply) between the mains and the computers. These units provide excellent protection for computers.

In Jordan where electric disturbances are rare, one may operate a PC for months without a glitch. People therefore hesitate to invest in additional protection equipment and run the risk of having to cope with a major problem every now and then, in a totally unpredictable manner.

The worst types of "accidents" are those that happen without you even knowing how or why they happened. Some kinds of electrical failures take place in a fraction of a second — too fast for any PC user to notice. The result is nevertheless lost data, computer failure, hard disk damage, etc. The thunderstorm that hit Amman last November put hundreds of modems out of order.

Is it worth spending 150 to 300 dinars on power protection equipment for your PC in Jordan? Only you can tell. It all depends on how vital your data is, if you do or do not have additional copies of it on external media and if you are willing to take some risks. The vast majority of home users choose to take the risk, while about 50 per cent of offices install some form of power protection.

Building religious/cultural bridges between Arab and Jewish university students

By Ben Mollov and Musa Isa Barhoum

WHEN THE late Anwar Sadat made his historic dramatic trip to Jerusalem 20 years ago, he asserted the importance of bridging the gap between Arabs and Jews by breaking what he called the "psychological barrier" existing between the two peoples.

While real and objective problems need to be solved between Israelis and the Arabs as part of a peace settlement, certainly the psychological atmosphere existing between Israelis and Palestinians is a factor which can either enhance or retard the possibilities for peace to develop.

In this article we suggest that the insufficiently explored commonalities between the Islamic and Judaic cultures can serve as a psychological bridge of the type which President Sadat spoke of, referring to concrete examples.

As educators of university students we would like to share our experiences as supervisors of a unique student dialogue which has been taking place for the last several years.

The dialogue has involved students from Bar-Ilan University and Palestinian students from a variety of Palestinian universities.

We believe that the experiences of the above mentioned dialogue point the way and serve as an excellent head-start toward the possibility that both Arabs and Jews can achieve positive perceptions of each other.

In contrast to the belief that religion only serves to fan the flame of conflict, the dialogue has shown that the religious background of both Islam and Judaism can contribute to a friendly psychological atmosphere which will bridge the gap between the two peoples.

When our students met for the first time three years ago in Bethlehem, it wasn't clear what common agenda could be found as a foundation for constructive dialogue.

The answers though appeared to come from the students themselves. It began with an innocent question by a Jewish woman student to an Arab student asking

her if she wore the head covering for the same reason that an Orthodox Jewish woman would.

This first exchange led to other questions and answers, for instance concerning similarities and differences between the observances of Ramadan and Yom Kippur, the kosher and Halal food, the way the two peoples worship the same God, the teachings of the two religions, the belief of the Muslims and Jews in the same one God, the respect and belief of the Muslims of all the prophets, the belief of the Muslims that Prophet Abraham is the grandfather of all Arabs and Jews. As a result of the last-mentioned point, one of the most important conclusions was the idea that Muslims and Jews as descendants of Abraham could achieve improved perceptions of each other.

When our students met for the first time three years ago in Bethlehem, it wasn't clear what common agenda could be found as a foundation for constructive dialogue.

Also they discussed the origins and similarities among the three monotheistic religions. A variety of topics were initially discussed.

The way the Koran and Prophet Mohammed recommended good treatment of neighbours. Even during war, the Islamic teachings advise the Muslims not to kill children, elderly people or women. In one meeting the story and significance of creation as presented in both the Torah and Koran were compared; in another meeting, essential prayers and religious credos in both Islam and Judaism were explored as expressions of the faith which Arabs and Jews hold dear.

As students from both sides wished to continue their meetings, it became clear to us that a continued comparison between Islam, Judaism (and Christianity) served as a highly constructive foundation for dialogue. Many important issues were dealt with in a thoughtful

manner such as the challenge of bio-ethics, or the ethics of life concerning both biological and social ecology; how the two religions update religious structure and observance in each era; and the manner in which prayer is performed by the two peoples.

Students were pleased to discover almost identical terminology or concepts for many elements in the two religions, as reflected in culture and language (for instance such as the name of God).

On several occasions high-level student faculty delegations from Japan and India, who were interested in bio-ethics from a religious perspective and in conflict resolution, joined and enriched the deliberations.

Besides the intellectual stimulation, the experience of scores of our students can

Personal relationships have developed which have survived the vicissitudes of sometimes turbulent current events; members have reacted constructively during tragedy and difficulty and have visited each other on personal occasions of both illness and celebration, thus creating a strong human bond for the dialogue to continue.

From our experience, we do not assume that achieving a formal Israeli-Palestinian peace will be easy. Both the Israeli and Palestinian members of the dialogue are proud members of their communities and have their respective religious and national principles.

However, we have found that we can enrich each other and together discover deeper elements such as our similar religious heritages which can serve to create a new atmosphere that would generate hope instead of despair, while the official leaders on both sides are summoned to arrive at a peace agreement ultimately to serve both of our peoples.

We sincerely hope that our efforts will be encouraged by the formal leadership on both sides and that other groups will follow our example.

In recent years, courageous leaders have come forward to enable the peace process to develop. President Sadat understood the importance of breaking the psychological barrier between Arabs and Jews and building new bridges between them, and Yitzhak Rabin sensed new possibilities in the region. It is their legacy which we wish to honour and build upon as we tap into the cultural background of Islam and Judaism as a basis for conflict resolution and perception change to occur.

Ben Mollov is a lecturer in political science at Bar-Ilan University and coordinates the Department of Political Science at the Ashkelon Regional College under Bar-Ilan's auspices. Musa Isa Barhoum is an assistant professor at Al-Quds Open University. He is in charge of the Department of Educational Technology. He has taught at several Palestinian universities. The article is reprinted from the Website of the Jerusalem-based Hebcom Middle East Bureau.

Jordan, Germany to negotiate debt rescheduling accord next week

By Tareq Ayyoub
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — A Jordanian team will leave for Bonn Saturday to negotiate with German officials the rescheduling of 12.5 per cent of the Kingdom's total debt to Bonn, the team spokesman said Wednesday.

Odeh Sweiss, director of the finance department at the Ministry of Finance, said the three-member delegation will also discuss during their six-day visit to Germany, the possibility of swapping \$50 million of debt with foreign investments.

Dr. Sweiss said the team includes two officials from the Ministry of Finance and a third from the Central Bank of Jordan (CBJ).

The official told the Jordan Times that the talks with the Germans "will be based on the May 1997 fourth round of the rescheduling agreement that Jordan signed with the Paris Club. That accord paved the way for bilateral agreements between Jordan and its foreign creditors."

He added that following the May agreement, Jordan succeeded in rescheduling its foreign debts with 10 countries, mainly in Europe. In the past few years, Jordan and Germany signed three debt rescheduling agreements that covered the Kingdom's \$400 million foreign debt to Germany. The latest accord was reached in 1994, said Dr. Sweiss.

"The rescheduling will temporarily ease the foreign debt service and offer Jordan a chance to swap its debts with foreign investments," added Dr. Sweiss.

"We look forward to win an interest rate less than the LIBOR rate, or 5.6 per cent, for the \$50 million as well as a reasonable grace period for repaying the debt," he noted.

Dr. Sweiss said the team will propose swapping the \$50 million with foreign investments and to get a "good" redemption rate "as we did with the French government."

Dr. Sweiss was referring to the 1994 debt swap agreement with a redemption rate of 47 per cent, for 325 million French francs of Jordan's total debt to Paris.

"There is nothing to prevent reaching a swap of debt with the Germans," said Dr. Sweiss. "We will use this agreement to attract foreign investments to the country."

Most of the Kingdom's debts to Bonn were used for industrial, agricultural and water projects, added Dr. Sweiss, who will head the delegation.

The Ministry of Finance official said debt rescheduling arrangements with Italy and Canada were on the agenda.

Following its Oct. 1994 peace treaty with Israel, Jordan succeeded to win debt relief and reschedule of some of its foreign debt.

Indonesia's austerity budget 'meaningless' — analysts

JAKARTA (AFP) — The strict austerity budget unveiled by President Suharto will have little impact on the battle against Indonesia's crippling economic crisis, analysts said Wednesday. Southeast Asian currencies led by the local rupiah plunged to new lows and stock prices here fell in reaction to Tuesday's budget, which one analyst here described as "meaningless and unrealistic." The rupiah dove 15 per cent against the dollar before rallying.

The draft budget balanced revenues and spending at 133,491.9 billion rupiah (\$18.5 billion) with rises held to 32.1 per cent in rupiah terms but down 52 per cent in dollar terms. The budget, aimed at steering Indonesia out of its worst economic crisis for decades, "will have a very, very limited impact on the economy," said economist Didik Rachbini of the Institute of Development, Economy and Finance.

Mr. Rachbini said the only part of the budget which could help alleviate the economic burden was the development budget that would fund "labour-intensive projects to absorb the spill of unemployed workers from sectors seriously affected by the economic crisis." Development expenditure rose to 41.1 trillion rupiah (\$10.3 billion) or 5.6 per cent in rupiah term but the government's official inflation figure for 1997 already stood at 11.05 per cent.

"I think the budget carries more of a political message than an economic one," senior economist Martin Panggabean of Lippo Securities said. Mr. Panggabean said that in economic terms, the budget would have an insignificant impact on the country's efforts to battle its economic problems.

"The government is trying to tell the country that it will try hard to reduce inflation, and push down the currency while at the same time address the reforms needed," he said.

But he added that many of the budget provisions pointed to a deepening of the slowdown.

"Just look at the value added tax receipts, which is expected to rise some 13 per cent. The only way is to raise the tax and this signals further slowdown in the economy," he said. A researcher at a corporate research house said that despite Suharto's budget statement that the government was determined to go ahead with its planned structural economic adjust-

ments, more details on the moves were needed to restore public confidence. "He (Suharto) is also talking about the need for solidarity in facing the crisis, for sacrifice, but where are the examples?" the researcher said.

The researcher cited the lawsuit by Bank Jakarta, one of the 16 banks closed down by the government in November, against its liquidation, and the rising commercial practice of pegging prices of goods to the dollar. Others stressed that the budget was based on doubtful assumptions on the state of the Indonesian economy.

For budget purposes it was assumed that during the fiscal year inflation would be at nine per cent and growth at four per cent. Average oil prices were estimated at \$17 per barrel and the rupiah's exchange rate at 4,000 rupiah to the dollar.

"The government is taking great risks with the assumption they are taking," Mr. Panggabean said although he added that he believed the government would work hard to keep inflation down to nine per cent, thereby allowing growth of four per cent.

"But on the 4,000 rupiah, is this realistic?" Mr. Panggabean asked. The rupiah has been continuing to break record lows since July. It traded at 2,450 rupiah to the dollar in July but touched an incredible 8,550 Wednesday before it settled back to between 7,900-8,100. Forex dealers here said that the rupiah was heading towards even lower levels.

The Jakarta Stock Exchange composite index closed trade 2.0 per cent lower to 394,239 points. "The rupiah seems to indicate what the financial markets are thinking (about the budget)," Paribas Asia Equity director of institutional sales Robert Allison told AFP. Asia, an AFP-affiliated financial news agency. An analyst with a regional brokerage went even further, calling the government's budget assumptions "meaningless" and "unrealistic."

Economist Rachbini conceded that the budget assumptions carried "serious risks," but they were "the best the government could do at this time of uncertainty," and called for periodical budget reviews.

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR THURSDAY, JANUARY 8, 1998

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) Group plans do not materialise this morning. Don't worry. By afternoon, a better opportunity will have taken its place. You may have to postpone a social event this evening. Don't complain. This is a chance you've been waiting for, so don't let it slip by. The work will be satisfying, and the remuneration will be abundant.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) If your job is not what you're supposed to be doing, with your talents, the answer is obvious. Don't quit, but get training so you can as soon as possible. You have to line up in the direction of your greatest gifts, if you want your life to be of service to others.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) Your obligations are ruining your social life. You could get an absolutely outrageous opportunity, and have to turn it down simply to keep your miserable job. You wonder if it's worth it. Well, it's only going to be tough for another day or so. By the weekend, you'll be able to go and play.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 21) You and your group can't get the money you need. If this is a charitable organisation, it's time for a fund-raiser. You're all going to have to be creative, but it looks like you're the one who comes up with the winning idea. It won't be easy, but success does look assured. Don't give up.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) There's money coming, possibly from a book you've written. You haven't written a book? Well, this would be a good time to start. An older person is watching you. If this one signs your paycheques, you'd best comply with his or her demands. It's a good day to ask for a raise. You might even get one without asking.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) A co-worker wants you to work through lunch. Go relax with your sweetheart instead. It'll help you retain your composure. You'll put on another stellar performance this afternoon, but don't stay late. There's confusion at work later tonight, and you want to avoid it if you can.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) Confidential information is the secret to your success. Try not to make a decision before lunch time, however. If you wait a little longer, your chances of success improve. The afternoon should be very productive, but don't work into the night. Don't discuss financial matters with your sweetheart after dinner, either.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) There will be barriers popping up all day long. It's just because you're trying something you haven't done before. It's best to find the problems earlier, rather than later. You will triumph, although it might take until tomorrow to see those results. Don't give up.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) You're learning and pushing to advance. As you do this, you may feel that you're in an area where you're not sure of yourself. This is called growing. A necessary part of this is the confusion you're experiencing. You may not break through until tomorrow, so don't give up.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) You could get a lucky break in a financial matter around the middle of the day. There's a hassle before and after, however. If you can hold on to resources you acquire today, you'll be glad you did. There's another opportunity coming up tomorrow morning, and it will be best to have something in reserve.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) You could suffer a temporary setback this morning. Something you want is not available. You may feel your perseverance is being tested, and you could be right. If everything were easy, life would be a bore. Keep holding out for the best deal and you're able to get it. But it might not come through until tomorrow.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) This is a complicated day, but you'll make it with a friend's help. You'll also have to use your brains. You can't solve the problem without more information. Go to a person who has been through a similar situation. There's lots of wheeling and dealing behind the scenes, but you should be able to emerge triumphant. Don't give up.

Birthstone of January: Garnet — Rose Quartz

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR FRIDAY, JANUARY 9, 1998

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) A lunch date could lead to romance. If you're not in a relationship, get close to someone you'd like to start one with. It's a good afternoon to begin a group project. Try a bigger challenge than ever before. You need something like that to keep you interested.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) Make your major decisions as early as possible. Don't procrastinate. Later in the day, your focus shifts to financial matters. It may seem like there's not enough money to do what you want. Remember that old line about necessity being the mother of invention? Necessity is pushing you to try new things. One of them is bound to work.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) If your work's done, you might be able to travel this weekend. How about skiing at Tahoe, or perhaps the Swiss Alps? This won't happen if you've been goofing off. Put in the correction, and next time this condition comes around, it's off to the Alps for you. Meanwhile, back to work.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 21) A friend can help you solve a difficult problem this morning. Talk it over with one who's more predictable than you are. This person has had the same lifestyle for longer than you can remember. Your problem is that things in your life are changing. If you need a little stability, go to one who has a lot of it.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) Complete a project this morning. You'll make a good impression on an older person and increase the money coming in. This afternoon, you'll have more chance to socialise. That's also your best opportunity for romance. In fact, it may find you. It looks like your partner is in an aggressive mood. This could be interesting.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) Ask for what you want early this morning. Later, everything gets confusing. Your boss or teacher or parent will order you to do one thing, then expect you to have something else done at the same time. Don't you get frazzled too. Instead, help this person get organised. That will make both of your lives a lot easier.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) The morning starts out slow, but the day gets better. By afternoon, you should be doing pretty well. You'll be able to find just the right words, especially with loved ones and children. You'll also be firm and decisive, so watch what you say. You'll have to keep any agreements you make this evening.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) You could get a good opportunity this afternoon. If you have your budget figured out, you'll know how much you can afford to spend. Money is not necessarily tight, but it never hurts to spend it wisely. The time you spend planning earlier in this day will show up as money saved later.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) Things will fall together this morning, and money might even fall into your pocket. It's not from winning the lottery. It's from work you've done recently. Celebrate at lunch with your favourite person. Choose a date who can teach you something. It looks like love and learning are linked right now. This could turn out to be something a bit more personal. It's up to you.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) Your life should start moving faster around the middle of the day. It might seem like you have too much to do, but that's never stopped you before. You're probably finding it exciting. Don't forget to get the clients to sign on the dotted line. If you forget something today, the mistake could be an expensive one.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) A problem you've been struggling with starts to ease around the middle of the day. The solution either becomes obvious, or you simply stop caring. Your interest shifts to romance tonight, and it's about time. You've done without it for long enough. Set up a dinner date. You and your sweetheart have a lot to talk about.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) Spend the morning studying, so you can handle a difficult situation this afternoon. It's not as hard as it is confusing. You want to ask everyone else's opinion, but you need to make sure your own interests are protected. You tend to do what everybody else wants. That's admirable, but not really necessary.

Birthstone of January: Garnet — Rose Quartz

Thai economy worst-hit by Asian crisis — OECD

PARIS (AFP) — The Thai economy will suffer the worst from the South East Asian economic crisis, with its economy shrinking by 1.0 per cent in 1998 before returning to growth in 1999, the OECD has said.

"Thailand, which has been severely affected by financial turbulence, has suffered the largest slowdown," the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) said in its six-monthly economic outlook report.

Thailand will see economic growth of just 1.0 per cent this year, with gross domestic product shrinking by 1.0 per cent next year before growth returns at 3.0 per cent in 1999, the OECD said.

But this is still far behind other regional economies, such as South Korea with growth of 5.5 per cent in 1998 and 1999 and the Philippines with 3.5 per cent growth in 1998 and 4.5 per cent in 1999 despite the crisis.

THE Daily Crossword

Edited by Wayne Robert Williams

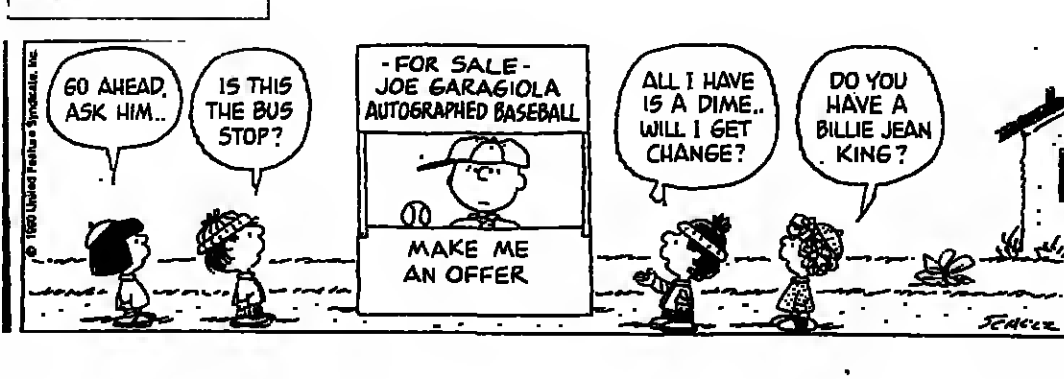
ACROSS

- Abode
- Watch winder
- Underground growth
- Ugandan dictator
- Having the skill
- Profound's creator
- Reminder to rushers
- Photographer Adams
- Most strict
- Mob meleé
- H.S. subj.
- Beanies
- Classic Olds
- Saturates
- Pindar poem
- Mark brother
- Grackle's scratcher
- Don't rush
- Fountain in Rome
- Non-violent protest
- Pekoe, e.g.
- Claim
- Crescent's shape
- Escalator
- Hindu title of respect
- Stratagem
- Making current
- Mecca shrine
- What's the rush?
- Stand for a portrait?
- Gandhi's garb
- Send out
- Playground ride
- Ball-shaped cheese
- Part in a play

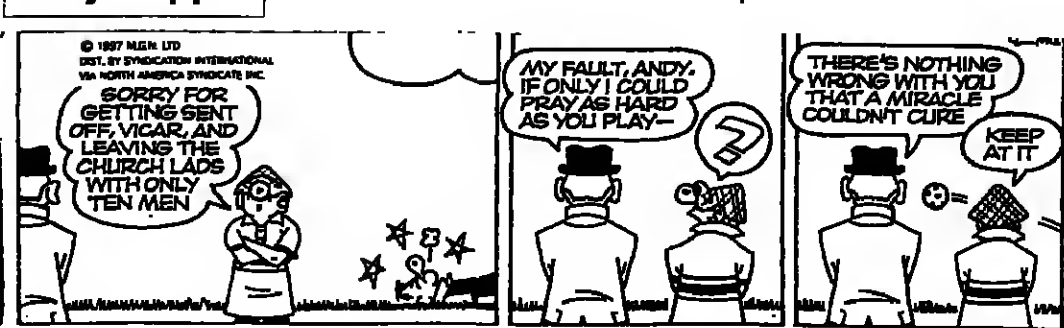
DOWN

- Laughter sound
- Arabian sultanate
- Shool wide
- Penetrates
- "Cher's" bartender
- TV guide abbr.
- Fraternal order
- Encounters
- Like a revised manuscript
- Marine of "The Good Earth"
- Seine tributary
- Little children
- Editor's order
- Inventor
- Whitney
- Brief time spans
- By mouth
- Coppley and Garr
- Terra
- Hebrew months
- Lap dogs, for short
- Of the eyes
- Devour
- The in crowd
- Apples, pears, etc.
- Move furtively
- Beauty parlor
- Abalone eater
- Holiday prelude
- Of
- Small combo
- More pricey
- Alum
- Currently occupied
- Schuss
- Hawaiian guitars, briefly
- Ring bells
- Lucy's Amaz
- Learned monkey-style
- Sphere starter?
- Heat to
- Pot starter
- Spanish Mrs.
- That guy

Peanuts



Andy Capp



Mutt'n' Jeff



THE BETTER HALF

By Glasbergen



"I don't enjoy going to holiday parties since having fun became politically incorrect."

JUMBLE

Unscramble these four Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

BUICC

STRUY

LOSFIS

KRANET

Answer here: _____

Yesterday's Jumbles: SWOOP ENACT AUTHOR LARYNX

Answer: A noon-time workout can turn into this "POWER" LUNCH

Daily Business Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

Investors offered 25-year concession to build new railway

**** Jordan is offering local and foreign investors a 25-year concession to build a new railway line between the phosphate mines of Shiddiya and the southern port city of Aqaba, officials have said.**

An official of the transport ministry said local and foreign investors have until Jan. 25 to submit their applications. The selected firm or consortium will own the line for 25 years at the end of which the government will take over.

The official said a short list of firms will be asked to submit technical proposals for the \$94 million plan that will include rehabilitating an existing line between Shiddiya and another mine at Hassa, some 35 kilometres to the north.

Shiddiya is about 100 kilometres northeast of Aqaba.

The official said that "experienced railway operators" are required to run the project that involves major expansion work to double the rail's capacity.

He said the concession includes operation and maintenance of the railway and upgrading locomotives and wagons.

The new link will result in at least five million tonnes of phosphate being transferred to Aqaba per year, up from 2.5-3 million tonnes a year now, the official said.

Jordan's main source of hard currency is phosphate and potash.

Royal Wings to buy new plane

**** Royal Wings, a subsidiary of Royal Jordanian airline, will buy another Bombardier Dash 50-seat plane to help increase its flights to Near East, an official has said.**

Ahed Quntar, director general of Royal Wings, said this will be the third aircraft to be purchased from the Canadian firm. Bombardier, the plane, scheduled for delivery in mid-January, will operate short and medium-range routes.

With the addition, Royal Wings will be able to fly daily to Sharm Al Sheikh beach resort in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, and the

Egyptian city of Gharadqa on the Red Sea. Flights to Al Arish in the Sinai and Larnaca in Cyprus will also increase to three or four per week, said Mr. Quntar. He added that chartered flights to Rhodes, Antalya, Alexandria, and other destinations will also become feasible, starting next March.

The airline, which started operations in March 1996, operates three weekly flights between Amman and Tel Aviv, and there are plans to increase them to eight per week.

Kingdom to get FF80m soft loan from Paris this year

By Tareq Ayyoub
Special to the Jordan Times

AMMAN — Jordan will receive 80 million French Franc (FF) as a soft loan for the current year from France in line with a financial protocol that was reached this week between the two countries, a government official said Wednesday.

Mustafa Al Saleh, director general of the bilateral cooperation department at the Ministry of Planning, said the protocol was concluded during the one-day meeting of the Jordanian-French financial committee, headed by the ministry's Secretary General Nabil Ammari and Thierry Dissaud, under-secretary of the French ministry of Finance.

Dr. Saleh declined to give details of the protocol but Dr. Ammari was quoted as saying that the loan, with an interest rate of one per cent and a grace period of seven years, is payable over 22 years.

The official told the Jordan Times that the loan will be used to finance infrastructure projects, especially in water and health projects.

The loan will be used

also to finance a waste water treatment plant in Ramtha as well as to purchase equipment for the Central Post Office and the Ministry of Health, added Dr. Al Saleh.

He added that the loan will be used also for financing the hotel training centre in Amman Hotel and furnishing the Palace of Justice.

The protocol is expected to include an extra FF 10 to 12 million as grant from Paris as "technical assistance" to the Kingdom, Dr. Ammari was quoted as saying.

The new protocol, which will be signed next Monday, bears no change compared to the previous year protocol, which amounted to FF 90 million.

In 1994, the two governments signed a debt swap agreement for the Kingdom's debt to France which amounts to FF 350 million.

The agreement stipulates a rate of redemption of 47 per cent of the total amount.

It allows the Jordan to exchange the remaining amount (FF 127) for foreign investments in the Kingdom instead of direct debt repayment.

Arab Bank seeks credit rating

By Sulaiman Khalidi
Reuters

AMMAN — Arab Bank, one of the region's major financial institutions, is seeking a credit rating to access cheaper global funding and reflect its financial strength, its chairman said Wednesday.

"There is a company which is discussing with us assigning a credit rating," said Abdul Majeed Shoman, chairman of Arab Bank Group, declining to name the agency.

"We hope to get A, plus," Mr. Shoman said, adding he expected the rating to be assigned next month.

Mr. Shoman said a credit rating would help the bank, the only truly global Jordanian bank, to get access to cheaper funding from international banks, despite the bank's large \$10 billion deposit base which makes it highly liquid.

Mr. Shoman said the assigned rating would be constrained by the sovereign ceiling in Jordan, which is below investment grade.

"Arab Bank, because of its financial prowess and traditionally prudent banking philosophy, will receive a better rating than the country it is in," said one investment banker.

Most of Kingdom's banks have yet to be assigned ratings.

Only around 20 per cent of Arab Bank's total deposits are in Jordan, followed by 38 per cent in the rest of the Middle East, 23

per cent in Europe and 10 per cent in the U.S.

The Kingdom's private banks, mostly family-dominated concerns prodded by the Central Bank to reach a minimum JD20 million (\$28 million), pale in comparison to Arab Bank's financial base, boasting assets of over \$16 billion.

Arab Bank's growth is tied to its regional and global expansion as it evolved into one of the region's major financial institutions, surmounting major political upheaval in the Middle East since its establishment in Jerusalem in 1930.

"We are different from other Jordanian banks because of our presence in over 40 countries outside Jordan... and a large part in the Arab World, the Far East and Europe," Mr. Shoman said.

"Arab Bank's diversification gives it its strength," Mr. Shoman said, referring to its loans portfolio and the bank's wide geographic spread in Europe, the U.S. and the Far East.

Mr. Shoman also brushed aside fears of a foreign bank takeover prompted by a landmark ruling last September, which lifted a 50 per cent foreign ownership ceiling on most publicly listed stock in the Amman bourse.

"They cannot take over the bank, as our shares are spread across the Arab World and a large number of shareholders own the bank's shares as an investment because its return is

high," said Mr. Shoman, a prominent figure in the Arab banking community.

The bank is the Arab World's largest privately held bank with only 11 per cent owned by Arab governments, including Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. The rest is owned by mainly long-term investors, 70 per cent of whom are non-Jordanian Arabs.

Its shares, over a third of Amman bourse's capitalisation, have risen 30 per cent since the start of 1997 and after scrapping the 50 per cent ceiling as foreigners and local investors targeted the heavy weight under-valued blue-chip.

Mr. Shoman also disclosed that Arab Bank posted record 20 per cent growth in its 1997 net profits from the previous year's \$197.9 million, but declined to give an exact figure.

Arab Bank's results in 1997 were better than any other year since it was established... and is due to our better results in our branches in Europe, the U.S., the Far East and the Arab Gulf states," Mr. Shoman said.

Mr. Shoman also said Arab Bank Group's total balance sheet rose more than 10 per cent in 1997 from \$21 billion in 1996.

Arab Bank, with over 300 branches globally, was maintaining its expansion and playing a growing investment role to adapt to a more competitive global banking environment, Mr. Shoman said.

REUTERS • THE BUSINESS OF INFORMATION

Major Currencies & Cross Rates									
Currency	USD	DEM	GBP	CHF	JPY	CAD	ITL	NLG	FRF
US Dollar	1.0000	1.8232	0.6188	1.4763	131.73	1.4326	1788.30	2.0544	6.1021
DE Mark	0.5486	1.0000	0.3373	0.8083	72.24	0.7851	986.82	1.1267	3.3466
GB Sterling	1.6240	2.9609	1.0000	2.4001	214.02	2.3264	2906.84	3.3361	9.9082
CH Franc	0.6774	1.2340	0.4164	1.0000	89.21	0.9695	1211.89	1.3814	4.1291
JP Yen	0.0076	1.3831	0.4667	1.1198	1.0000	1.0865	13.57	165.87	4.6298
CA Dollar	0.6881	1.2832	0.4259	1.0260	1.09	1.0000	1244.05	1.4232	4.2271
IT Lira	0.0006	1.0494	0.3438	0.8824	1389.99	0.7998	1.00	11.47	3.4060
NL Guilder	0.4888	0.8872	0.2894	0.7493	64.07	0.6970	870.43	1.0000	2.9890
FR Franc	0.1638	0.2988	0.1008	0.2470	21.55	0.2346	33.65	33.6500	1.0000

Middle Eastern Currencies									
Currency	USD	DEM	GBP	CHF	JPY	CAD	ITL	NLG	FRF
US Dollar	1.0000	1.8232	0.6188	1.4763	131.73	1.4326	1788.30	2.0544	6.1021
Jordan Dinar	1.4104	2.5900	0.8317	5.1351	431.14	5.1804	2156.56	4.8018	14.018
Saudi Riyal	0.2668	0.4890	0.1605	0.3708	30.68	0.3611	4056.70	0.9306	2.836
Bahrain Dinar	2.85	5.1806	1.8348	10.302	856.13	10.302	4056.70	0.9306	2.836
Qatar Dinar	0.2747	0.4947	0.1632	1.0302	85.61	1.0302	4056.70	0.9306	2.836
Kuwait Dinar	2.2696	4.1381	1.4262	1.2325	11.90	1.2325	4056.70	0.9306	2.836
Emirate Dinar	0.2723	0.4930	0.1622	1.0265	0.9913	1.0265	4056.70	0.9306	2.836
Lebanese 1000	0.85	1.5337	0.5330	1.2466	103.12	1.2466	4056.70	0.9306	2.836
Egyptian	0.2937	0.5330	0.1817	0.4107	33.65	0.4107	4056.70	0.9306	2.836

Energy									
Commodity	Unit	Price	Unit	Price	Unit	Price	Unit	Price	Unit
Brent	15.36	15.64	15.36	15.64	15.36	15.64	15.36	15.64	15.36
WTI	15.36	15.64	15.36	15.64	15.36	15.64	15.36	15.64	15.36
Bonny	15.36	15.64	15.36	15.64	15.36	15.64	15.36	15.64	15.36
UL Gas	164.00	167.00	164.00	167.00	164.00	167.00	164.00	167.00	164.00

Mid-East Currencies									
Currency	USD	DEM	GBP	CHF	JPY	CAD	ITL	NLG	FRF
SA Riyal	0.2668	0.4890	0.1605	0.3708	30.68	0.3611	4056.70	0.9306	2.836
AE Dirham	0.2723	0.4930	0.1622	1.0265	0.9913	1.0265	4056.70	0.9306	2.836
KW Dinar	2.2696	4.1381	1.4262	1.2325	11.90	1.2325	4056.70	0.9306	2.836
BH Dinar	0.3770	0.6881	0.2381	0.5330	43.12	0.5330	4056.70	0.9306	2.836
CY Pound	1.8682	3.4063	1.1495	2.768	226.103	2.768	4056.70	0.9306	2.836

Currency Deposit Rates (Bid)									
Period	1 Month	3 Months	6 Months	9 Months	1 Year	Period	1 Month	3 Months	6 Months
USD	5.53	5.56	5.59	5.59	5.59	USD	5.53	5.56	5.59
GBP	7.25	7.31	7.31	7.31	7.31	GBP	7.25	7.31	7.31
JPY	0.45	0.36	0.46	0.46	0.46	JPY	0.45	0.36	0.46
DEM	3.38	3.49	3.52	3.52	3.52	DEM	3.38	3.49	3.52
FRF	3.67	3.69	3.69	3.69	3.69	FRF	3.67	3.69	3.69
CHF	1.03	1.34	1.44	1.44	1.44	CHF	1.03	1.34	1.44
ITL	8.05	5.90	5.80	5.23	5.07	ITL	8.05	5.90	5.80

JOD Cross Rates									
Currency	Buy	Sell	Currency	Buy	Sell	Currency	Buy	Sell	Currency
US Dollar	0.708	0.710	US Dollar	0.708	0.710	US Dollar	0.708	0.710	US Dollar
GB Sterling	1.1475	1.1532	GB Sterling	1.1475	1.1532	GB Sterling	1.1475	1.1532	GB Sterling
DE Mark	0.3866	0.3875	DE Mark	0.3866	0.3875	DE Mark	0.3866	0.3875	DE Mark
CH Franc	0.4772	0.4796	CH Franc	0.4772	0.4796	CH Franc	0.4772	0.4796	CH Franc
JP Yen	0.1152	0.1158	JP Yen	0.1152	0.1158	JP Yen	0.1152	0.1158	JP Yen
FR Franc	0.5304	0.5331	FR Franc	0.5304	0.5331	FR Franc	0.5304	0.5331	FR Franc
NL Guilder	0.3422	0.3439	NL Guilder	0.3422	0.3439	NL Guilder	0.3422	0.3439	NL Guilder
IT Lira	0.3928	0.3948	IT Lira	0.3928	0.3948	IT Lira	0.3928	0.3948	IT Lira

AMMAN FINANCIAL MARKET											
HOUSING BANK CHARTERED AMMAN - SHIRASIM											
TELEPHONE: 607171 / 607179											
ORGANIZED MARKET SHARE PRICE LIST FOR WEDNESDAY 07/01/1998											
PAST 12 MONTHS		COMPANY'S NAME	P/E	QTY.	NO. OF TRANS.	NO. OF SHARES	VALUE TRADED JD	OPEN PRICE	CLOSE PRICE	CHANGE	
HIGH	LOW										
	346,000	250,000	ARAB BANK	14.9	1.23	7	2620	848840	323.00	324.00	1.00+
N	2,340	1,680	JOR. NATIONAL BK.	E	0.00	21	15225	27416	1.78	1.81	.03+
VS	3,540	1,670	BANK OF JORDAN	6.2	0.00	25	28347	33058	1.67	1.66	.01-
	1,300	890	MID. EAST. INV. BK.	76.9	0.00	1	100	113	1	1	.06-
	2,680	1,650	INDUSTRIAL DEV. BK.	10.2	6.14	4	300650	499302	1.71	1.70	.01-
	980	620	JOR. GULF BANK	3.9	10.14	4	11760	7722	1.66	1.66	-
S	4,050	2,250	JOR. ISLAMIC BANK	11.7	4.17	6	11700	6901	2.29	2.30	.01+
S	3,900	2,300	JOR. INV. FIM. BANK	14.8	0.00	16	150150	345362	2.30	2.30	-
N	2,500	2,250	JOR. INV. FIM. BANK/WEH	E	0.00	8	75000	168750	2.25	2.25	-
BANK SECTOR TOTALS			INDEX: 231.44	%CHG: +0.27	91	577642	1934825				
	2,100	1,590	JOR. FRENCH INSUR.	5.8	7.32	10	1959	4015	2.04	2.05	.01+
INSURANCE SECTOR TOTALS			INDEX: 123.26	%CHG: +0.05	10	1959	4015				
	2,050	1,550	JOR. ELECTRIC PWR.	9.3	5.18	16	41875	81136	1.93	1.93	-
	1,590	930	NATL. PORTFOLIO	9	0.00	6	4130	4269	1.02	1.04	.02+
	1,590	1,150	MID. EAST HOTELS	19.0	0.00	4	3750	4693	1.24	1.25	.01+
	4,000	2,890	ARAB INTL. INV. EDUC.	10.2	0.00	2	3150	12285	3.94	3.90	.04-
	1,090	900	SARKA EDUCATION	9	0.00	1	1000	950	.95	.95	-
SERVICE SECTOR TOTALS			INDEX: 117.01	%CHG: -0.14	31	54010	103619				
	1,160	930	ATTANKEER	9	0.00	1	250	290	1.16	1.16	-
	4,450	2,750	JOR. CEMENT FACT.	20.5	3.62	20	9750	29960	3.04	3.04	-
	11,160	9,200	JOR. PETROL. REFINARY	10.1	8.49	5	5235	2449	10.39	10.47	.08+
	4,700	3,400	ARAB PHARM. MANF.	11.8	4.67	37	7200	30747	4.25	4.28	.03+
	6,000	4,400	DAR ALDAHIA OV. INV.	13.8	4.45	2	1750	9808	5.65	5.62	.03-
	460	440	LIVESTOCK & POULTRY	9	0.00	17	6750	5288	4.45	4.45	-
	720	510	NATIONAL INDUS.	9	6.00	4	11700	6901	.99	.99	-
	1,150	370	INTERMED. PETRO. CHEM.	9	0.00	6	4650	1860	4.40	4.40	-
	830	530	JOR. SULPHO-CHEM.	9	0.00	8	144900	89691	.59	.59	-
	1,150	1,150	ARAB PHARM. CHEM.	14.9	5.98	3	145	4611	1.15	1.17	.02+
	1,130	580	KAWTHEER INVEST.	57.2	0.00	1	250	250	.61	.61	-
	1,800	820	UNTV. MODN. INDUS.	P	.24	44	50950	44643	.86	.88	.02+
	1,410	680	JOR. INDUS. RESOURCES	9.5	14.08	15	8750	6213	.70	.71	.01+
	1,420	1,350	NATL. CHARLOTTE	13.8	4.79	1	100	146	1.46	1.46	-
	960	810	JOR. NEW CABLE CO.	16.5	0.00	5	1500	1350	.90	.90	-
	1,310	1,080	INTL. TOBACCO	6.6	0.00	8	24250	29099	1.19	1.20	.01+
	1,200	850	UNION CH. & VEG.	46.4	0.00	4	1850	1882	.97	1.02	.05+
	810	710	JORDAN STEEL	32.6	0.00	3	349	350	.72	.72	-
	840	570	MID. EAST COMPLEX	7.6	16.13	48	83950	52638	.62	.62	-
INDUSTRIAL SECTOR TOTALS			INDEX: 113.70	%CHG: +0.11	237	368076	317772				
GRAND TOTAL			INDEX: 167.93	%CHG: +0.18	369	1001687	2360231				
PARALLEL MARKET SHARE PRICE LIST FOR WEDNESDAY 07/01/1998											
	.530	.300	CENTRAL GEN. STORAGE	9	0.00	4	11000	352	.33	.32	.01-
	.610	.340	JOR. TRADE FAC.	9.6	0.00	3	2500	900	.36	.36	-
	.800	.650	UNION INV. 50%	P	0.00	7	22250	4450	.70	.70	-
	.360	.570	ARAB FIM. INVEST.	9	0.00	15	1500	29248	.48	.48	-
N	1,000	.720	AL-SHARQ INV. CO.	P	0.00	3	30000	27600	.92	.92	-
	.780	.610	AL-DAMLJIYAH 75%	68.1	0.00	7	50800	22857	.68	.71	.03+
N	2,320	1,050	CENTURY INV. GROUP	0	0.00	1	100	300	1.97	2.00	.03+
	.750	.380	NATL. MULT. ENG. NAHICO	0	0.00	16	63150	30312	.48	.48	-
N	1,200	.890	READY MIX CONCRETE	12.7	0.00	1	500	525	1.00	1.05	.05+
	1,500	.860	UNION TOBACCO 75%	9	2.00	4	2925	3246	1.37	1.36	.01-
	.470	.240	UNION ENG.	9	0.00	1	3000	3000	.83	.83	-
	.820	.490	NATL. POULTRY	E	0.00	6	3950	2130	.26	.27	.01+
	1,100	.720	ARAB INT. FOOD FACT.	47.7	0.00	3	2761	2733	.99	.99	-
IN	1,060	1,000	SUTRADAR 75%	E	0.00	18	13825	11899	1.06	1.11	.05+
GRAND TOTAL					106	266545	139767				
I : New 12 months high + : New 12 months low S : Stock dividend during the past 12 months N : Listed during the past 12 months P : P/E ratio is 100 or more											

Russia and U.S. win opening golds at World Championships

PERTH (AFP) — Russian Alexi Akatiev and American Erica Rose won the opening gold medals at the World Swimming Championships with emphatic wins in the five-kilometre open water swims off Perth's northern beaches Wednesday.

Akatiev, the reigning 5km and 25km open water European champion, swept past plucky Australian teenager Ky Hurst to land the men's gold medal in 55 minutes 18.6 seconds.

Rose was even more emphatic, surging clear of the no-bolds-harred pack to capture the women's event in 59 minutes 23.5 seconds.

The United States carried off another gold for the team event, calculated on the best times of the respective countries' men and women competitors.

Sixteen-year-old Hurst went out hard in the men's race in the flat Indian Ocean swell in oppressive temperatures to lead until about 500 metres from the finish at Hillarys Boat Harbour.

Hurst tired and Akatiev surged ahead to take the gold with Hurst holding on for the silver medal in 55m 24.9s and Italy's Luca Baldini touching third in 55m 37.4s.

The diminutive 15-year-old Rose bolted home in



Erica Rose of the United States on her way to winning the gold medal in the women's five km open water race at the eighth world swimming championships at Hillary's Boat Harbour in Perth January 7. Rose won Edith van Dijk of the Netherlands and Germany's Peggy Buchse (Reuters photo)

the following women's race emerging triumphant from the water after her 59m 23.5s swim.

"In the beginning it was really tough, there was pressure from a number of swimmers so in the second half I just decided to take off," she said.

"This is definitely a special win, I'm very excited because it is a big win."

The Australian competitors, rookies Kristy Park

and Bronwen Whitehead, could attest to the jostling for positions in the pack pursuing Rose.

Both emerged from the water distressed and Whitehead told how other swimmers had tried to rip off her cap and goggles and tugged on her swim suit.

"I've never encountered anything like that even in the surf in Australia," said 20-year-old Whitehead, who finished sixth.

"I don't like being beaten around when it is sport and sport is not about that."

Rose had the luxury of around 95 seconds to spare ahead of silver medallist Edith van Dijk of the Netherlands in 1hr0m58.8s and German European 5km champion Peggy Buchse third in 1hr1m5.8s.

The U.S. won the teams event with 18 points from Russia (16) and Italy (14).

Doubts cast over Chinese performance after drug tests

PERTH (AFP) — An Australian critic of China's phenomenal surge as a swimming power believes extra drug-testing will ensure a below expectations performance from the Chinese at the world championships here.

The head of the Chinese delegation Shi Tianshu said on the team's arrival here Tuesday that world body FINA had carried out more than 100 out-of-competition tests on Chinese swimmers in the past two months and none had returned a positive test.

Shi also told reporters that the Chinese Swimming Federation had also conducted more than 650 tests on their swimmers in the past year.

Anti-drugs advocate coach Forbes Carlile has been outspoken about China's astonishing improvement in swimming since their women won 12 out of 16 events at the 1994 Rome world championship.

Heading into this week's world championship, Chinese women are number one in the world in every event except breaststroke, butterfly and the 800m freestyle.

"On current world rankings, they could expect to take home a record 26 medals from these championships," Carlile said Wednesday.

"But I applaud FINA for the testing it's done in the meantime and I don't think the result for the Chinese will be as overwhelming as in Rome."

Carlile said evidence uncovered by German scientists, who studied the performances of East German swimmers during the 1970s and 80s drug regime, suggested a definite drop off in speed once an athlete stopped taking drugs.

"I'm hopeful that the extra testing by FINA will slow the Chinese down in Perth," he said.

"If the tests were carried out properly it should mean a deterioration in their performances."

Carlile's suspicions were heightened by stunning performances by Chinese female swimmers at their national games in Shanghai last October.

They set 10 times faster than the best recorded in the pool at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics.

Chen Yan and Wu Yanyan broke 400 and 200 metre individual medley world records despite being ranked outside the world's top 50.

China's swimmers claimed only one gold at Atlanta and the same at the Pan Pacific Games in Fukuoka, Japan, last August — their return to that meet after a drugs-related ban in 1995.

Shi told reporters at Perth Airport Tuesday that China's swimmers were clean from drugs.

"My federation has made it very clear that our swimmers are not to violate the rules. We do not have any facts that any of our swimmers are using drugs," Shi said.

"We compare with any nation in the fight against drugs."

China's link with drug abuse stems back to the 1994 Hiroshima Asian Games when seven women, including two world champions, tested positive to steroids.

SPORTS IN BRIEF

Lazio crush Roma

ROME (AFP) — Lazio went on the rampage Tuesday as they trounced bitter local rivals AS Roma 4-1 in an Italian Cup quarter-final first leg match. More than 60,000 fans watched Lazio score twice in each half as they recorded their second win over Roma this season. They also beat their local rivals 3-1 in a Serie A match on November 2. Alen Boksic and Vladimir Jugovic were on target in the first half and Roberto Mancini and Diego Fuser netted in a five-minute spell late in the second period. Roma's only goal was a 38th-minute penalty from Argentine striker Abel Balbo, who was later sent off for a second bookable offence. The second leg will be played on January 21. Three remaining quarter-final first leg matches will be played with Fiorentina hosting Juventus and Parma at home to Atalanta on Wednesday and AC Milan playing Inter Milan on Thursday.

Roma, Saby in the lead

SMARA, Morocco (AFP) — Joan Roma and Bruno Saby lead the way in the Paris-Dakar following Tuesday's sixth stage, a 354km run from Ouarzazate to Smara. The day's honours in the hike category went to Slovenia's Jaroslav Katrinak on a KTM, who saw off favourite Stephane Peterhansel of Yamaha by just 16 seconds with BMW's Spanish rider Oscar Gallardo third. Roma now leads the overall standings by 2min 27 sec from KTM's Fabrizio Meoni of Italy. Katrinak is third to underline KTM's early domination. Frenchman Saby is still clear in the Mitsubishi-dominated auto category although teammate and compatriot Jean-Pierre Fontenay won his first stage of this year's edition by finishing three minutes clear of his rival. French world ski champion Luc Alphard meanwhile stands a creditable 18th in the auto standings in his first shot at the event in a Mitsubishi.

Argentina wants to eradicate violence

BUENOS AIRES (AFP) — Argentine Football Federation President Julio Grondona says he is more worried about fan violence overshadowing the World Cup than his country winning a third title. "More than the title I just want once and for all to eradicate the evil which has afflicted (football) for 30 years," Grondona told Buenos Aires daily "La Nacion." "Everyone knows it just can't go on," added Grondona. Argentina last month passed a tough new law to crack down on soccer violence following the deaths of four people at matches. Among the measures being taken to combat the problem are the introduction of closed-circuit television to identify "barbarians" or hooligans as well as the creation of a data base on the troublemakers.

Dortmund has new injury crisis

DORTMUND (AFP) — European champions Borussia Dortmund will face Barcelona in Thursday's Super Cup without a clutch of top internationals as the club's injury jinx continues. Matthias Sammer, Juergen Kohler, and Manfred Binz will all miss the game at the Nou Camp with injury while Stefan Reuter is suspended. Sammer is recovering from a fifth knee operation. Kohler has torn knee ligaments and Binz has "ankle ligament trouble." But Italian coach Nevio Scala is keeping his fingers crossed that Portuguese playmaker Paulo Sousa will be fit despite recurrent knee problems.

Zelic back to Bundesliga

MUNICH (AFP) — Australian stopper Ned Zelic is heading for Munich 1860 after the German side agreed a \$440,000 move with current side AJ Auxerre of France. Zelic, 26, is set to sign a deal keeping him at Munich until June 2000, the Bundesliga outfit said. It will be Zelic's second spell in the German top flight. After arriving in Europe from Olympic Sydney, he had a brief spell with Eintracht Frankfurt and then helped Borussia Dortmund to the 1993 UEFA Cup final before moving to Queens Park Rangers in the English Premiership. Injury problems dogged him at Loftus Road and he joined Auxerre only to fall out with coach Guy Roux as his fitness problems continued.

Lewis-Briggs set March 28

LONDON (AFP) — Lennox Lewis will defend his WBC heavyweight title against American Shannon Briggs on March 28 in Atlantic City, his management group announced. The bout has been scheduled following the breakdown of talks between Lewis' management and WBA and IBF champion Evander Holyfield for a unification bout. The proposed deal fell through when American Cable television network HBO declared the boxers were asking for too much money. "I don't think there is hope for a Holyfield fight," said Lewis' promoter Panos Eliades. "It should have happened by now. It's definitely out." Briggs, 25, won the lightly-regarded WBU title with a controversial points victory over veteran George Foreman on November 22. He has a 30-1 record. Prince Naseem Hamed, meanwhile, will make the 10th defence of his WBO world featherweight title on the same date. Sheffield-based Naseem stopped New Yorker Kevin Kelley at Madison Square Garden on December 19. No opponent or venue have been announced by promoter Frank Warren.

Rusedski wins in Doha

DOHA (AFP) — Greg Rusedski followed fellow Briton Tim Henman into the second round of the \$975,000 Qatar Open in Doha with a straight-sets win over Spaniard Juan Albert Viloca on Tuesday. The British No.1 downed clay court specialist Viloca, who made two ATP Tour finals last year and is ranked 73rd in the world, 6-4, 6-4. The Canadian-born Rusedski is the top seed at the tournament following the withdrawal of Russia's Yevgey Kafelnikov. Henman, the fifth seed, beat Spaniard Javier Sanchez 7-5, 6-1 on Monday.

Atkinson signs foreigners

SHEFFIELD (AFP) — Sheffield Wednesday manager Ron Atkinson has signed two more foreigners on trial as part of his new policy of bringing in players from abroad to look at them in training and the reserves. The newcomers are 25-year-old Polish international centre-half Pawel Wojtala from German club Hamburg and 20-year-old Icelandic goalkeeper Olafur Thor Gunnarsson from Icelandic second division club IR.

Gebrselassie in GP

BIRMINGHAM (AFP) — Ethiopia's double Olympic champion Haile Gebrselassie gave beleaguered British athletics a welcome boost here on Wednesday as it was announced he will compete in the Indoor Grand Prix here on February 15. The 24-year-old Gebrselassie, who won his third 10,000 metres world title in Athens last year but lost both his 5,000 and 10,000 metres world records in Brussels later in August, will join Britain's world triple jump record holder Jonathan Edwards among the competitors. Edwards said: "I want my return to indoor competition to set the tone for a great season — all Britain's leading athletes want to help keep the sport in the public eye."

PSG edge through

PARIS (AFP) — A first half tap-in by Florian Maurice fired Paris Saint Germain into the last 16 of the French league cup on Tuesday as they saw off Lyon 1-0 before a miserly 13,000 crowd at the Parc des Princes. Brazilian skipper Rai escaped his marker and sped down the right flank before whipping in a low cross which Maurice, a former Lyon star, nudged into the net from six yards in the 34th minute. Two of PSG's main rivals in the competition, which nets the winner a UEFA Cup place, crashed out Tuesday when league champions Monaco lost to second division Niort on penalties while holders Strasbourg bowed out 3-2 at Cannes. But league leaders Metz went through after coming from behind to win 2-1 at second division Gueugnon.

Saib eager to join Spurs

LONDON (AFP) — Algerian international midfielder Moussa Saib said here on Wednesday that he would be "very happy" to join struggling English Premiership giants Tottenham Hotspur. The 28-year-old Saib, who inspired his former French side Auxerre to the 1996 national title, has been holding talks with Spurs about a £4 million (\$6 million) move from Spanish side Valencia. Saib, who joined Valencia from Auxerre last summer, told the "London Evening Standard" he would be "very happy to sign for Spurs within the next few days." Spurs, who are second from bottom in the Premiership and scraped a fortunate 3-1 win over Fulham in their FA Cup third round tie on Monday, need a midfielder badly.

Germans take coach ban to court

PERTH (AFP) — The German Swimming Federation (DSV) is taking its festering dispute with world swim body FINA over its banned head coach Winfried Leopold to court.

FINA announced on Sunday it had withdrawn Leopold's accreditation for the eighth world championships in response to Leopold's admissions upon arrival here last Thursday that he had administered drugs to swimmers in the former East Germany.

The German federation appealed against FINA's decision but an expected hearing Wednesday did not take place.

The federation president Rudiger Tretow said Wednesday the federation had retained the services of a German-speaking local lawyer Dirk Feinauer to have the matter heard in the Supreme Court here Thursday.

Tretow said that initially the DSV did not plan to lodge an appeal against FINA's decision, but had been moved by a demonstration of support from all of its swimmers to appeal.

"The German federation and Mr. Leopold have commenced Supreme Court proceedings in respect of FINA's

withdrawal of Mr. Leopold's accreditation," Feinauer said reading from a prepared statement at a press conference.

"The matter came before his Honour, Justice Walsh, in the Supreme Court at 10.30 a.m. this morning."

"The case on the part of the German Swimming Federation and Mr. Leopold is that the decision taken by FINA executive and the FINA bureau is outside the powers conferred on FINA by its constitution and rules."

"The application this morning is for an injunction restraining the first (FINA) and second defendants (FINA secretary Gunnar Werner) from excluding Mr. Leopold from providing coaching services in relation to the 1998 world championship."

Werner, was reported by a local news agency here Tuesday, as saying that Leopold had been penalised for embarrassing FINA with his apology upon his arrival for the world championship rather than for his past involvement in the East German doping regime.

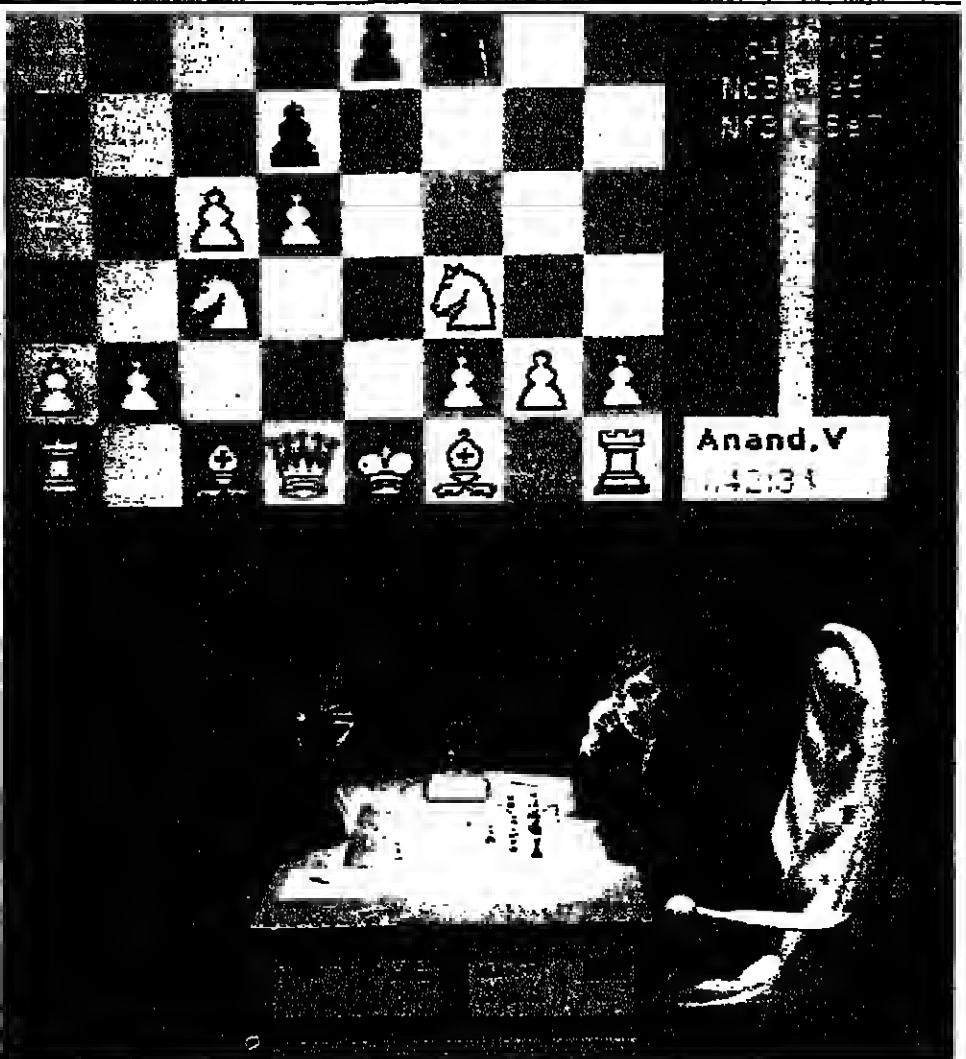
"If he had kept his mouth (shut) here, there would be no reason to react," Werner was quoted as saying.

Karpov beats Anand in 4th game

LAUSANNE (AFP) — Russian titleholder Anatoly Karpov defeated Viswanathan Anand of India here on Tuesday in the fourth game of the World Chess Federation (FIDE) championship tournament, putting him ahead. Karpov now leads by 2.5 to 1.5 points, and only has to win one more game out of the two remaining to keep his crown.

Karpov won the first game on Friday and Karpov won the second, with the third drawn.

The tournament is taking place at the Olympic Museum on the shores of Lake Geneva and is due to run until Friday. A tie-break will be played if the six games result in a draw. The winner of the tournament will pocket \$1.37 million. Details of the match play are available on FIDE's Internet site at <http://www.chessweb.com>



Indian Viswanathan Anand (L) plays with the white pieces against Russian champion Anatoly Karpov during the fourth game at the world chess championships in Lausanne. After three games the players draw 1.5-1.5 with three more games to be played (Reuters photo)

CINEMA	TEL: 634144		TEL: 634144		TEL: 699216		TEL: 677420		TEL: 079 33430		TEL: 079 33430		TEL: 079 33430	
	PHILADELPHIA "1"		PHILADELPHIA "2"		PLAZA		CONCORD		GALLERIA 2		GALLERIA 1		Hisham Yanes Theatre	
TODAY AT	George Clooney & Nicole Kidman ... in		Winona Rider & Anne Bancroft ... in		SCREAM		CONCORD "1"		ABDOUN		ABDOUN		NOW ON DAILY	
	THE PEACEMAKER		AMERICAN QUILT		AL MASEER (Arabic)		MR. BEAN		THE JUROR		THE CABLE GUY		THE GOVERNMENT IN THE SERVICE OF PEOPLE	
	Shows: 12:15, 2:15, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30		Shows: 12:15, 2:15, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30		Nour Al Sharif Shows: 8:30, 10:45		Shows: 12:15, 2:15, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30		Shows: 8:30, 10:30		Shows: 2:00, 6:30, 8:30, 10:30		Starring Hisham Yanes and Amal Dabbas	
					HERCULES		CONCORD "2"		GEORGE OF THE JUNGLE				For reservations call: 640155, 625155	
					Shows: 2:00 p.m.		MR. BEAN		Shows: 2:00, 6:30					
							Shows: 6:30, 8:30, 10:30							

Morocco (AFP) — Joan Saby lead the way in the following Tuesday's sixth day of the 1998 World Cup in the bike's category. Saby, a 27-year-old from Ouarzazate, Morocco, won the gold medal in the 100km time trial. He finished in 1:01:00, ahead of Spain's Juan Carlos Delgado (1:01:10) and Italy's Roberto Tonello (1:01:20). Saby's early dominance in the time trial was a surprise, as he is not considered a favorite. He is a professional triathlete and has won several national titles in Morocco. Saby's victory was a significant boost for Morocco's cycling team, which has been struggling in international competitions. The time trial was held in the Atlas Mountains, where Saby's local knowledge of the terrain proved to be a major advantage. He maintained a steady pace throughout the race, gradually building a lead over his competitors. His victory was celebrated by the Moroccan people, who have a long tradition of cycling. Saby's win was also a testament to his hard work and dedication to the sport. He plans to continue training and competing in international events. The 1998 World Cup in cycling was a success for Morocco, with Saby's win being the highlight. The event was held in a beautiful setting, and the competition was fierce. Saby's victory was a historic moment for Morocco, and it will be remembered for years to come.

ski wins in Doha

AFP — Greg Rusedski, the 1997 Wimbledon champion, won the Doha ATP event on Monday. Rusedski, 27, defeated Andre Agassi, 6-4, 6-3, 6-1. Rusedski's victory was a surprise, as Agassi was the favorite. Rusedski is a former world number one and has won several Grand Slam titles. He is known for his powerful serve and aggressive play. Rusedski's win in Doha was a significant achievement, as it was his first ATP title since 1997. He is now ranked world number one. Rusedski's victory was celebrated by the Doha tennis community, which has been supporting him for many years. The Doha ATP event was a success, and Rusedski's win was the highlight. The event was held in a beautiful setting, and the competition was fierce. Rusedski's victory was a historic moment for Doha, and it will be remembered for years to come.

son signs foreign

LD AFP — Son Joo-hyung, the 1997 Wimbledon champion, signed a contract with the South Korean tennis federation. Son is a former world number one and has won several Grand Slam titles. He is known for his powerful serve and aggressive play. Son's signing with the South Korean tennis federation was a significant achievement, as it was his first contract since 1997. He is now ranked world number one. Son's signing was celebrated by the South Korean tennis community, which has been supporting him for many years. The signing was a historic moment for South Korea, and it will be remembered for years to come.

elassie in GP

GHAM — The 1997 Wimbledon champion, Andre Agassi, won the GP event on Monday. Agassi, 27, defeated Greg Rusedski, 6-4, 6-3, 6-1. Agassi's victory was a surprise, as Rusedski was the favorite. Agassi is a former world number one and has won several Grand Slam titles. He is known for his powerful serve and aggressive play. Agassi's win in GP was a significant achievement, as it was his first ATP title since 1997. He is now ranked world number one. Agassi's victory was celebrated by the GP tennis community, which has been supporting him for many years. The GP event was a success, and Agassi's win was the highlight. The event was held in a beautiful setting, and the competition was fierce. Agassi's victory was a historic moment for GP, and it will be remembered for years to come.

edge through

AFP — The 1997 Wimbledon champion, Andre Agassi, won the edge through event on Monday. Agassi, 27, defeated Greg Rusedski, 6-4, 6-3, 6-1. Agassi's victory was a surprise, as Rusedski was the favorite. Agassi is a former world number one and has won several Grand Slam titles. He is known for his powerful serve and aggressive play. Agassi's win in edge through was a significant achievement, as it was his first ATP title since 1997. He is now ranked world number one. Agassi's victory was celebrated by the edge through tennis community, which has been supporting him for many years. The edge through event was a success, and Agassi's win was the highlight. The event was held in a beautiful setting, and the competition was fierce. Agassi's victory was a historic moment for edge through, and it will be remembered for years to come.

ager to join Spu

N. AFP — The 1997 Wimbledon champion, Andre Agassi, won the ager to join Spu event on Monday. Agassi, 27, defeated Greg Rusedski, 6-4, 6-3, 6-1. Agassi's victory was a surprise, as Rusedski was the favorite. Agassi is a former world number one and has won several Grand Slam titles. He is known for his powerful serve and aggressive play. Agassi's win in ager to join Spu was a significant achievement, as it was his first ATP title since 1997. He is now ranked world number one. Agassi's victory was celebrated by the ager to join Spu tennis community, which has been supporting him for many years. The ager to join Spu event was a success, and Agassi's win was the highlight. The event was held in a beautiful setting, and the competition was fierce. Agassi's victory was a historic moment for ager to join Spu, and it will be remembered for years to come.

THE GOVERNMENT

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Sports

SCOREBOARD

World Swimming Championships

Teams event 5km open water (men and women):	
1. United States 18pts	
2. Russia 16	
3. Italy 14	
4. Australia 12	
5. Germany 10	
6. Slovenia 8	
7. New Zealand 6	

Hopman Cup

Group A:
Australia bt Spain 2-1.
Men's singles
Patrick Rafter bt Carlo Moya 7-5, 1-6, 7-6 (8/6).
Women's singles
Annabel Ellwood lost to Arantxa Sanchez Vicario 2-6, 4-6.
Mixed doubles
Rafter/Ellwood bt Moya/Sanchez Vicario 7-5, 6-2.

Australian men's Hardcourt Championship

Nicolas Escude (Fra) bt Thomas Johansson (Swe x7) 4-6 6-4 6-4;
Andre Agassi (USA) bt Sargis Sargsian (Arm) 4-6 6-4 6-4

Australian Women's Hardcourt Championship

Singles round 2:
Ai Sugiyama (Jap x4) bt Catherine Barclay (Aus) 7-6 (7-4) 6-1.
Doubles round 1:
Janet Lee (Tpe)-Lindsay Lee (USA) bt Liezel Horn (Rsa)-Paola Suarez (Arg) 6-4 7-5; Aleksandra Olsza (Pol)-Elena Tatarkova (Ukr) bt Magdalena Maleeva (Bul)-Sarah Pitkowski (Fra) 6-2 6-2.

French League Cup

Paris-SG 1 Lyon 0

DOHA ATP event

Andre Medvedev (Ukr) bt Daniel Vacek (Cze) 6-3, 6-4
Lars Burgsmuller (Swe) bt Richey Reneberg (USA) 4-6, 6-3, 6-1
Greg Rusedski (Gbr x1) bt Juan-Albert Viloca (Spa) 6-4, 6-4
Goran Ivanisevic (Cro) bt Hicham Arazi (Mor) 6-2, 6-3
Magnus Larsson (Swe x6) bt Jan Krosiak (Slo) 7-5, 6-4
Jeff Tarango (USA) bt Marc-K. Goellner (Ger) 6-3, 6-4
Bernad Karcher (Ger) bt Tomas Nydahl (Swe) 6-1, 6-1
Carlos Costa (Spa) bt Sergi Bruguera (Spa) 6-4, 6-2
Sjeng Schalken (Ned) bt Filip Dewulf (Bel) 6-0, 6-4
(carried over from Monday)
Karim Alami (Mor) bt Sultan Khalfan (Qat)

NBA

Phoenix	81	Indiana	80
Cleveland	100	Houston	70
LA Lakers	100	Vancouver	87
Chicago	90	Boston	79
Dallas	108	Denver	90
Utah	98	Philadelphia	95 (OT)
Seattle	102	Charlotte	81
Sacramento	105	LA Clippers	89

GOREN BRIDGE

WITH OMAR SHARIF & TAMMAM HIRSHI

ANSWERS TO WEEKLY BRIDGE QUIZ

- Q. 1 - Neither vulnerable, as South you hold:
AAQJ963 ♠ Void ♠ 643 ♠ KQ8
The bidding has proceeded:
SOUTH WEST NORTH EAST
1♠ Pass 2♣ Pass
What do you bid now?
A - What started out as a fair hand has improved dramatically with your fit for partner's suit. To tell how much you appreciate his bid, set the trump suit by raising to three diamonds. Rebid your excellent six-card major can wait.
- Q. 2 - Both vulnerable, as South you hold:
AAKJ4 ♠ 983 ♠ A986 ♠ 943
The bidding has proceeded:
NORTH EAST SOUTH WEST
1♠ Pass 2♠ Pass
What do you bid now?
A - If North has four trumps for the raise, you certainly want to be in the spade game. But if North has only three-card support, there could be a better spot. Bid three diamonds. Since there is no way you could want to play in a nine-trick partial rather than one a level lower, the bid is forcing. If partner returns to spades, and you can continue on to game.
- Q. 3 - As South, vulnerable, you hold:
AKQ5 ♠ 986 ♠ K ♠ KQJ1076
The bidding has proceeded:
NORTH EAST SOUTH WEST
1♠ Pass 2♠ Pass
What do you bid now?
A - After North's reverse, why waste time? This hand is perfect for Blackwood. If partner shows three aces, we would proceed straight to
- seven no trump. We can count 12 tricks and the 13th could come from the jack of spades, queen of diamonds, king of hearts, a 9-3 spade break and some other possibilities.
- Q. 4 - Neither vulnerable, as South you hold:
AAK1082 ♠ Q ♠ 7642 ♠ AAKJ
The bidding has proceeded:
SOUTH WEST NORTH EAST
1♠ Pass 2♠ Pass 3♠ Pass
What do you bid now?
A - There are two possibilities - four hearts or three no trump. Don't even think of three no trump. Since partner has shown a distributional hand and at least a good six-card suit, the raise to four hearts is a clear choice.
- Q. 5 - Neither vulnerable, as South you hold:
10986 ♠ A ♠ KQ1087 ♠ 1084 ♠ 46
Your right-hand opponent opens the bidding with one diamond. What action do you take?
A - If you have adopted weak jump overcalls, this hand is perfect for a jump to two hearts - good offense with your suit, as trump, but no defense outside your suit. If you still employ classic strong jumps, overcall one heart.
- Q. 6 - Both vulnerable, as South you hold:
AAK106 ♠ K ♠ KQ882 ♠ 8986 ♠ 43
Your right-hand opponent opens the bidding with one diamond. What action do you take?
A - We can understand if you feared a two-club response to a takeout double and opted for a one-heart overcall. Since that could result in missing a 4-4 spade fit, we would make a takeout double and stretch a little if partner responds two clubs, by removing to two hearts.



Andre Agassi

Rain saves Agassi from defeat

ADELAIDE (AFP) — One-time World No. 1 Andre Agassi recovered from a set down to beat a little-known Armenian player Wednesday, after escaping a looming defeat thanks to a rain delay the previous night. The former Australian, U.S., and Wimbledon champion has watched his ranking slip out of the top 100 in recent months. Entering the match against Sargis Sargsian, he was ranked 119 in the world to Sargsian's 69. When rain suspended play of the first-round match at the Australian men's Hardcourt tennis championships late Tuesday night, Agassi was down 4-6 2-3. But he came back strongly Wednesday to beat the Armenian 4-6 6-3 6-3. Agassi is in Australia in preparation for this month's Australian Open.

The Ferrari that 'must win' unveiled

MARANELLO, Italy (AFP) — The 1998 Formula One Ferrari F300, designed for Michael Schumacher to win the world championship, was unveiled at Ferrari headquarters here Wednesday. "We want to win the championship," Ferrari President Luca Montezemolo said, stating the aim openly for the first time in four years. "If we don't, we fail in our objectives." Montezemolo, who took over the ailing team in 1991, said it would have been unrealistic previously to publicly aim for victory. "This is the first time we can say with firm belief that next season we want to win the championship," he said. "We are not hiding our responsibilities." The 1998 F300 Grand Prix car has been entirely designed and built at Ferrari headquarters, after a series of cars were created in Britain by then chief designer John Barnard. The new car is the work of chief designer Rory Byrne and technical director Ross Brawn, who took Schumacher to two world championships at Benetton before being hired by Ferrari. It features an all-new engine by Ferrari engine chief Paolo Martinelli, who stressed that it was the first time in years that there had been built hand in hand with the chassis department. Byrne said the 1998 rules changes, with a narrower car on grooved tyres, and many safety-related changes, were the biggest upheaval in Formula One in 15 years. Brawn said Ferrari estimated that the changes would slow all the Formula One cars by about three seconds a lap at most of the Grand Prix circuits this year. The car has had 200 kilometres of initial testing. Schumacher will start detailed testing at Ferrari's Fiorano track next Friday, moving later to Jerez in Spain and being joined by Irvine. Ferrari will have two cars available in February to test in Barcelona, Spain, and Mugello, Italy.

FIFA rules out joint England-Germany World Cup bid

SINGAPORE (AFP) — Football's international governing body, FIFA, on Wednesday ruled out any joint hosting of the 2006 World Cup finals by England and Germany. The federation made it clear the 2002 finals in South Korea and Japan was a special case not to be repeated. Speculation mounted after Germany's bid chief Franz Beckenbauer said his country would not oppose sharing the 2006 finals with England. The two nations have launched campaigns that threaten to turn into a costly and damaging rivalry before a decision is made in 2000. "Both England and German have good claims and there is no point in them making a bid together," said FIFA spokesman Keith Cooper, speaking at the Football Expo '98 fair in Singapore. "As far as FIFA is concerned it is not an option as Japan and South Korea was a one off." "We are between the devil and the deep blue sea. We are not considering it but if another finals was co-hosted it would mean that every World Cup is co-hosted." Beckenbauer had predicted FIFA would oppose such a move because of the problems faced in Japan and South Korea. FIFA decided the two would host the first finals in Asia because of the animosity that built up between them in their bidding campaign.

Kafelnikov pulls out of Australian Open

MELBOURNE (AFP) — Russian tennis star Yevgeny Kafelnikov will miss the upcoming Australian Open for the second year in a row after withdrawing Wednesday because of a knee injury. The World No. 5 gave a hint of the problem when he pulled out as top seed at this week's Qatar ATP Tour event. He injured his knee while practising for the Open, the first major tournament of 1998. Kafelnikov also suffered slight facial burns when fireworks exploded near him during a New Year's celebration with friends in Frankfurt, tennis officials said. He failed to play in last year's Australian Open after fracturing his right hand in a freak accident in a Melbourne gym the week before the Grand Slam competition began. The Russian smashed the hand into a punching bag while training with Swiss Marc Rosset, who injured his own hand two years ago in Perth by slamming it into a courtyard wall in anger during the Hopman Cup final.

Germany win at Hopman Cup

PERTH (AFP) — Hard-hitting Anke Huber gave Germany a promising start in their tie against third-seeded South Africa in the Hopman Cup tennis mixed teams tournament at Burswood Dome here Wednesday night. Huber, 23, ranked 14th in the world, defeated Amanda Coetzer, 26, fourth in the rankings, in straight sets, 6-3, 6-3 in 72 minutes. Huber's win was a setback to South Africa's hopes of reaching the final Saturday. Germany have only an outside hope of qualifying for the final, but could still squeeze in if they beat South Africa and then conquer the United States Friday.



Seattle's Gary Payton (R) applies defensive pressure to Charlotte's Cory Beck (L) during first period play at Key Arena in Seattle on January 6. The Sonics led at the end of first quarter 29-27 (Reuters photo)

Shaq scores 25 on return to Lakers

VANCOUVER (AP) — Shaquille O'Neal bad 25 points, 14 rebounds and five assists in his first start since returning from an injury and the Los Angeles Lakers overcame a poor first half to defeat Vancouver 100-87 Tuesday night. Los Angeles erased a nine-point halftime deficit by hitting 10 straight shots to open the third quarter and held the lead the rest of the way. Eddie Jones finished with 22 points despite shooting 4-for-13 in the first half. Kobe Bryant came off the bench to score 17 points — 15 in the second half — and Rick Fox added 16 points and eight rebounds. Bryant Reeves led Vancouver with 24 points, shooting 11-of-15 with 11 rebounds and four assists. • Suns 81, Pacers 80: At Indianapolis, Rex Chapman scored 18 points and phoenix — despite Cliff Robinson missing 10 of his final 11 free throws — defeated Indiana to snap the Pacers' 10-game home winning streak. Chapman missed a 3-pointer with 10 seconds left, setting up Indiana for a shot at the win, but Travis Best missed a baseline runner at the buzzer. The Pacers, who shot a season-low 34 per cent from the field, got 15 points from Reggie Miller and 11 points and 10 rebounds from Rik Smits. But Miller shot just 3-for-12, and he and smits had just one field goal each in the second half. • Cavaliers 100, Rockets 70: At Cleveland, Derek Anderson had 19 points as Cleveland beat Houston for the first time in nearly two years. Charles Barkley left the game with an injured foot. X-rays were negative, but the 11-time all-star said the injury could be a stress fracture of the middle toe. Houston had its most lopsided loss of the season and the third-lowest point total in team history. Shawn Kemp had 14 points and 12 rebounds, wesley person had 15, and Brevin Knight had 12 points and eight assists for the Cavs. • Mavericks 108, Nuggets 90: At Dallas, Denver stayed winless on the road this season as Dennis Scott scored 28 points and made three 3-pointers in a key third-quarter run as Dallas won and broke its 15-game losing streak. Scott made three 3-pointers and had nine points in a 26-18 third quarter as Dallas expanded a 54-51 halftime lead to 80-69 entering the final quarter. Denver, which lost its 14th straight, was only able to get as close as 88-80 with 8:10 left on Harold Ellis' dunk. Samaki Walker scored six of Dallas' next eight points to push the advantage to 96-84. • Bulls 90, Celtics 79: At Chicago, Dennis Rodman grabbed another 20 rebounds and Toni Kukoc scored 9 of his 19 points during a decisive second-half run as Chicago won its 13th straight home game. Kukoc also had eight rebounds and six assists and Michael Jordan scored 19 for Chicago, which has won 11 of its last 12 games and improved its NBA-best home record to 17-1. Rodman had at least 20 rebounds for the eighth time this season and the seventh time in 11 games. Antoine Walker and Ron Mercer had 20 points apiece for the Celtics, who are 1-13 against Chicago since the start of the 1994-95 season.



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Khatami says Iran and America should move closer — officials

TEHRAN (AP) — In his first interview with a U.S. television network, Iran's President Mohammad Khatami has said that Iran and America should move closer after nearly two decades of hostility, officials close to him said Wednesday.

President Khatami also criticised U.S. leaders, saying they were to blame for the rift between the two nations, the official told the Associated Press.

The remarks were made in an interview recorded by the U.S.-based Cable News Network in Tehran late Tuesday for broadcast in the United States on Wednesday.

The officials said President Khatami praised the American people several times in the interview and said that citizens of the two nations should be brought closer together.

The officials, who sat in on the interview, said Mr. Khatami's tone was positive. They spoke on condi-

tion their names not be used.

Last month, President Khatami called for a dialogue with the "great American people," sending the strongest signal for possible renewal of friendship since the former allies broke ties in 1979.

His interview has been billed by his allies as an address to Americans, but this has been a clever ruse: by directing his remarks to the American people rather than their government, Mr. Khatami gets around Islamist hard-liners, who bold Washington in contempt.

Hard-liners have demanded that any call for dialogue with Americans be balanced with criticism of their leaders.

The hard-line speaker of the parliament, Ali Akbar Nateq-Nuri, told reporters on Wednesday that "to send a message to the American people is all right... We must speak to the American people and let them know

Iran's conservative leader defends dialogue with American people

TEHRAN (AFP) — The conservative speaker of Iran's parliament, Ali-Akbar Nateq-Nuri, on Wednesday backed dialogue between Iran and the people of the United States as U.S.-based television network CNN prepared to broadcast an unprecedented address from President Mohammad Khatami.

"Sending a message to the American people is not a bad thing. We have to talk to the American people and tell them about our grievances against their leaders," the speaker said, quoted by the official news agency IRNA. Mr. Nateq-Nuri, the leader of the conservative faction, was defeated by President Khatami in May's presidential election.

our complaints against the country's leader."

Mr. Khatami won the presidency last May by heavily outpolling Mr. Nateq-Nuri.

In Washington, State Department Spokesman James P. Rubin on Tuesday reaffirmed U.S. willingness to open a dialogue with Iran.

Mr. Rubin said the United States would raise with Iran its concerns about the

Muslim country's development of weapons of mass destruction, its support for terrorism and its opposition to the Middle East peace process.

"These are topics that we think ought to be part of a serious and substantive and authoritative and openly acknowledged dialogue that we have long said we'd be prepared to enter into," Mr. Rubin said.

Most Israelis support hardline stance in peace process — poll

TEL AVIV (AFP) — More than 50 per cent of Israelis support the hardline stance taken by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the peace process or feel he is not hardline enough, a poll suggested Wednesday.

The poll by Tel Aviv University found 39 per cent of respondents said Mr. Netanyahu's policy on the peace process was "balanced," while another 12.5 per cent said he was "too yielding."

Thirty-six per cent said Mr. Netanyahu's government was taking "too harsh" a stance in the peace process in the poll which was taken by phone over 505 households.

Meanwhile, 35.5 per cent of respondents said Mr.

Netanyahu was investing an "appropriate amount" of money in Jewish settlements in the Palestinian territories, while 12.5 per cent said he "does not invest enough."

Another 39 per cent said Mr. Netanyahu was giving "too much" money to expanding settlements. The remainder had no opinion.

Mr. Netanyahu has promised to conduct a troop withdrawal in the West Bank, but has resisted U.S. pressure to announce a large handover of land in the territory to Palestinian rule.

He has also repeatedly linked any movement in the deadlocked peace process to a stepped-up Palestinian crackdown against Islamist activists.

His government has also budgeted \$285 million for Jewish settlements in 1998, 20 per cent higher than the previous year, according to the anti-settler group Peace Now.

Meanwhile, five per cent of respondents said they would support "the use of firearms against undesirable government policies," a figure equivalent to around 175,000 people, the poll said.

Eleven per cent said they would support "non-violent rioting," while the remainder supported only "legal protest."

Israeli security services have warned of possible violence by Jewish extremist groups against Israelis or Palestinians in a bid to stop the handover of West Bank areas to self-rule.

Britain urges Algeria to accept U.N. mission

LONDON (AFP) — Algeria should accept a visit from a United Nations official to look into the massacre of civilians, British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook said Wednesday.

Britain is current president of the European Union (EU).

Algeria on Tuesday rejected calls by the United States for an international mission to investigate the killings.

"We have always backed the demand by the U.N. that Algeria should accept a visit from a rapporteur... to make sure that the concern of the international community is heard in Algeria and that the international community has the opportunity to hear the facts first hand from them," he told BBC Radio.

"There is a legitimate outside interest. This is a matter of concern for the international community," he added.

Mr. Cook reaffirmed that the EU wanted to send a delegation of senior people to Algeria who could find out what was happening on the ground. Newspaper reports from Algeria have spoken of more than 170 civilians slain, many of them decapitated, mutilated or burned alive, in massacres carried out by suspected Islamists since the weekend.

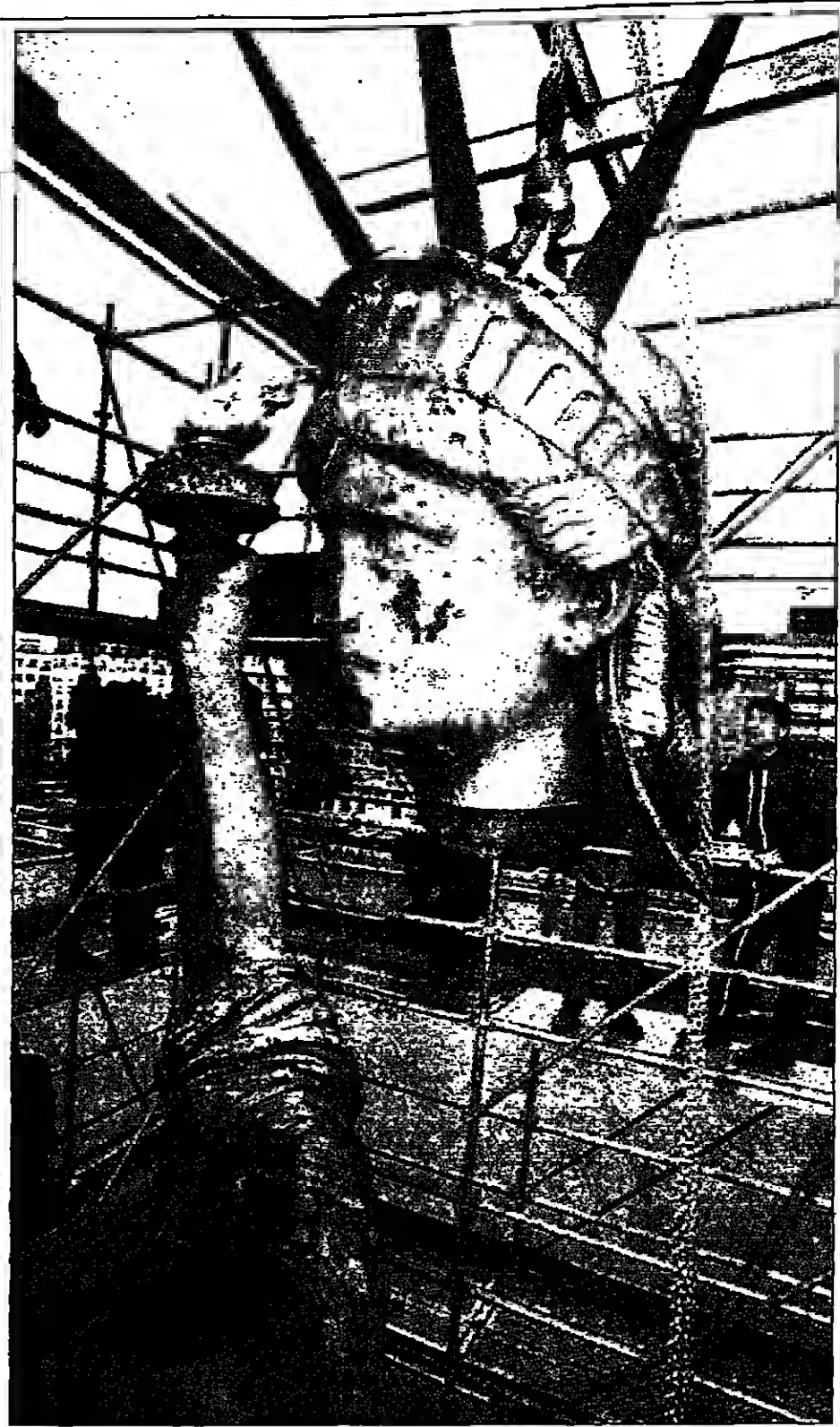
The latest massacres estimated bring to more than 600 the number of people reported killed in Algeria since Tuesday of last week, the start of the Islamic Holy Month of Ramadan. The six-year conflict between government forces and Islamists has claimed around 80,000 lives, according to Amnesty International. It erupted when the military intervened to prevent certain election victory by the now-banned Islamic Salvation Front.

Earlier this week Germany suggested sending a delegation representing the past, present and future EU presidents.

Luxembourg, Britain and Austria, to assess what aid the EU could give to victims of terrorism.

Discussions by EU experts will take place Thursday in Brussels and will continue next week with political directors from the foreign ministries of the member states.

The foreign ministers from the 15 EU countries will examine the results in a meeting on Jan. 25.



LIBERTY ON THE MOVE: Paris' Statue of Liberty, a smaller version of the New York harbour landmark, is disassembled before being temporarily shipped from its Seine River island home to Tokyo Wednesday. The 11.5 metres-14 tonnes statue was given to Paris by a private U.S. organisation in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the French Revolution. The statue is the work of French sculptor Frederic-Auguste Bartholdi, creator of the original Statue of Liberty given earlier to New York as a gift from France. It will go on display in Tokyo Bay in April 1998 for nine months as a gesture of Franco-Japanese friendship (Reuters photo)

Bethlehem breaks ground for new hotel ahead of year 2000

BETHLEHEM (AFP) — Palestinian President Yasser Arafat lay the cornerstone Wednesday for a new hotel in Bethlehem, part of the West Bank town's efforts to prepare for an expected influx of tourists in the year 2000.

The hotel, due to be finished in time for planned celebrations for the 2,000th anniversary of Jesus's birth, will have 12 wings with 258 rooms, its owner Daud Zir told journalists at the groundbreaking.

The hotel, which will be designed by a Moroccan firm, will provide employment to

some 200 workers, said Mr. Zir, who is also a Bethlehem delegate to the Palestinian legislative council. He did not reveal the cost of the project.

Palestinians are working against the clock to improve badly underdeveloped tourist infrastructure in the traditional birthplace of Jesus in time for the Bethlehem 2000 celebrations.

The town currently offers 900 hotel rooms and its mayor, Hanna Nasser, has said 600 more will be built over the next two years, far short of the 6,000 rooms officials say will be

needed to meet the rush of pilgrims for the year 2000.

Some five million visitors are expected to attend the year-long millennium celebrations in the town of 35,000 people, where tourism is already a key industry but has suffered greatly under repeated Israeli closures during the past year.

Bethlehem is competing with Israel to draw in tourist dollars from the event. Nearby Jerusalem already has 8,000 hotel rooms and another 4,000 are slated for construction by 2000.

Turkish minister for women's affairs under fire over virginity tests

ISTANBUL (AFP) — Turkey's minister of state for women's affairs drew heavy fire Wednesday from women's organisations by publicly supporting forced virginity tests for young women, a practice that has driven humiliated girls to suicide.

"This is unacceptable, especially for a minister for women's affairs," the president of the women's rights organisation KA-DER, Sirin Teteli, told AFP in Istanbul.

In a formal statement, the organisation, whose prime aim is to lobby for better representation of women in politics, called State Minister Isilay Saygin "one of the best examples of women politicians that KA-DER won't support."

Ms. Saygin was quoted in a recent interview as supporting virginity tests and calling the practice a "necessity." Although such tests are not actually legal in Turkey, there is a "nasty and patriarchal tradition" of the practice in some

regions, Ms. Teteli said.

In an infamous case in a small town in western Anatolia, three young girls were ordered to subject themselves to virginity tests by the school headmaster.

The practice is also widespread in university dormitories and has been known to extend to entrance examinations for public service posts, according to women's organisations.

State Minister Saygin especially enraged women by shrugging off the suicides of young girls subjected to the humiliating practice.

"Girls who have committed suicide because they were forced to take a virginity test would have committed suicide anyway," Ms. Saygin was quoted as saying. "I don't think this is really important."

Several women's rights organisations are calling for Ms. Saygin's resignation. "Saygin is [in office] in vain," Halime Guncir of

the Flying Broom women's group was quoted by the Turkish press on Wednesday.

The group vowed to campaign for the minister's removal from office, reminding her that women had fought for years to establish the institution in the first place.

Even the minister's own advisor Selma Acuner came out publicly against her on the issue. "A woman's body is her own affair and no-one else's business," Ms. Acuner told the press. "The state must not enter this private sphere."

KA-DER sees the issue of the virginity tests as part of a general climate of sexual repression of women in Turkey.

"This is just one manifestation of the fundamental problem, that women are treated as objects of family honour," Ms. Teteli said, pointing to the murder of girls deemed by their families to have gone astray.



New Beetle makes its debut

DETROIT (AFP) — The Beetle, the quintessential people's car which became an emblem for the flower-power generation of the 1960's, is back. But in its current incarnation, the lovebug has been recast as an upmarket auto, designed to attract nostalgic baby boomers, as well as their Generation X offspring. Amid great anticipation and much hoopla, Volkswagen's New Beetle made its world debut this week on the stage of the North American International Auto Show. Like a Hollywood movie star, the revamped bug — still sporting its distinctive bubble shape — was mobbed, filmed and photographed from every angle by hundreds of journalists from around the world.

German soldiers free to choose own underwear

BONN (AFP) — German soldiers fed up with regimental khaki or white underwear can now, officially, branch out and choose their own. A defence ministry spokesman said troops had been ignoring the regulation army-issue underwear for some time and it was a waste of money supplying the clothes if they were not going to be worn. Now soldiers will be given the choice of the same old gear or \$27 to buy their own underwear, he told AFP. And the design, style or motif will be entirely their own choice. "We won't be checking."

Hallyday survivor of 'hell-raising rocker era'

PARIS (AFP) — Ageing French rocker Johnny Hallyday says he takes cocaine — but these days, it's only to help him work. He told France's Le Monde daily that he used to snort cocaine "from the moment I fell out of bed in the morning." "That's finished now. I only take it for work. To get inspired, to keep going. And I'm not the only one," he added. Hallyday, 54, said he had the impression he was one of the few remaining survivors of the hell-raising rocker era. "There's Mick Jagger and me," he added. Others had either turned "bourgeois... addicted to candy," become "vegetables" or died.

Remake of 'Planet of the Apes' planned

PARIS (AFP) — Fresh from the sail-away success of "Titanic," James Cameron now wants to return to dry land... the "Planet of the Apes." The Canadian director says he is in talks with 20th Century Fox to produce a remake of the cult film, with Arnold Schwarzenegger maybe taking the lead. The original "Planet of the Apes," which starred Charlton Heston and Roddy McDowell and was made in 1967, is about a space craft that crash-lands into the future, in a world where apes are the masters and humans the slaves.

Hucknall joins government panel on music industry

LONDON (AFP) — Mick Hucknall, whose group Simply Red once sang "Money's too tight to mention," is to join a government panel aiming to do just that. The Times reported Wednesday that Hucknall, already a committed supporter of Britain's ruling Labour Party, has agreed to sit on a task force advising the government on the music industry. It is made up of artists, managers, record company executives and retailers involved in an industry which recorded domestic sales of more than \$1.7 billion last year.

Turkey demands explanation of British criticism of Ankara

ANKARA (AFP) — Turkey said Wednesday it had asked Britain for an explanation of remarks by Foreign Secretary Robin Cook suggesting that Ankara is nowhere near ready for European Union (EU) membership.

British Ambassador David Logan was summoned to the foreign ministry on Tuesday, ministry spokesman Necati Utkan said.

Mr. Cook told BBC Television on Sunday that Turkey was not a credible candidate for joining the

European Union in the foreseeable future, mainly because of its human rights record.

Mr. Cook, current president of the EU council of foreign ministers, said it was important to maintain dialogue with Ankara, which angrily cut political ties with Brussels last month after being told it was not included in the union's enlargement plans for the near future.

"Of course there are a lot of very serious reasons why Turkey is not now, and will not be in the foresee-

able future, a credible candidate," Mr. Cook said, citing "its human rights record, the fact its eastern borders are not very clear."

"Turkey, to be qualified for the European Union, would have to match the standards of democratic governments, civilian control of the military, human rights observance, respect for ethnic minorities," Mr. Cook said.

Britain will hold the rotating EU presidency until June 30.